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1827

THOUGHTS
ON
THE VALUE
OF
FEELINGS IN RELIGION.

BY
JOHN JOACHIM SPALDING,

A DIGNITARY IN THE CONSISTORY OF BERLIN,
IN THE LAST CENTURY.



TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN,

BY ARTHUR B. EVANS, A.M.

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OF THE CATHEDRAL SCHOOL IN GLOUCESTER.

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SOME ACCOUNT
OF
THE AUTHOR,

TAKEN FROM HIS LIFE, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,
PUBLISHED BY HIS SON IN 1804.

JOHN JOACHIM SPALDING was born the first of November, 1714, at Tribbsees, in Swedish Pomerania. His father, John George Spalding, was Rector, that is, Head Master of the School, and afterwards Minister of the Church there. His mother was the daughter of Joachim Lehments, a clergyman of Tribbsees. He received his first instruction from his father, and afterwards from the successor in the school, John George Kitter, to whose ability he expresses himself as greatly indebted. At fifteen, he was removed to the school at Stralsund, from which he derived no great benefit. At seventeen, he was entered at the University of Rostock, of which he does not speak in favourable terms; languages being but little

cultivated, and church history not at all; while the philosophy taught there was exclusively scholastic and Aristotelian. In 1733, before he was nineteen, he was obliged to undertake the office of tutor in the family of a country gentleman. From this period to the year 1748, in which his father died, Spalding's life was diversified by similar engagements as tutor, and by occasional residence with his father at Tribbsees. But the year 1746, and part of 1747, he spent at Berlin, as secretary to Mr. Von Rudenschöld, the Swedish ambassador, during the indisposition of the official secretary. In 1749, he entered upon the ministerial office at Lassahn. In 1757, he removed to Barth, a town of Pomerania, as principal preacher, and president of the synod in that place. It was in this year that he employed, for the first time, many of his leisure hours on the work which is now given to the public in an English dress. He thus expresses himself upon the subject: — “I had occasion, some years ago, to turn my thoughts this way, in consequence of the stress which was laid upon penitential struggles, on converting grace perceptible by the feeling, and the rest of the mystical methods of conversion, which

were taught in the former school of Halle, were stated in several publications, and were particularly enforced in practice, by a party of divines in the neighbouring state of Mecklenburg. I was very desirous of previously ascertaining, clearly, what truth or error, what good or harm, might be discovered in this doctrine. This I wished to do, without injury to any one by precipitate judgment on my part, and without doing any prejudice to religion itself, and the salutary practice of it. This lengthened, and, as I thought, impartial inquiry, gave occasion to the first edition of this tract in 1761 ; which was followed by a second in 1764 ; and a third in 1769, both with considerable additions ; and, finally, with a fourth and fifth in 1775, and 1785, with no additions of any consequence. The additions were principally occasioned by objections which appeared against my work, in various publications. In these objections I found misconception, erroneous inferences, and even ill-founded suspicions, often expressed with bitterness. But after what I have added in my second and third editions, these objections appear to occur more rarely than before with the greater part of theological readers."

In 1763, three young men became agreeable inmates in Spalding's family, who afterwards made some figure in life,—Lavater, Fuseli, and Hess, all of Zurich, in Switzerland. Fuseli was afterwards the well-known painter of that name in London. Hess became a clergyman of much reputation, but died young. Lavater's name is too well known to be dwelt upon.

In June, 1764, Mr. Spalding quitted Barth, to settle at Berlin, upon an invitation to succeed Mr. Koppe in the situations of * Oberconsistorialrath and Probst in that city. In this situation he is described by Mr. Maty, in his Analytical Review, in the following terms :— “John Joachim Spalding, a very distinguished preacher at Berlin, remarkable for the depth and simplicity of his compositions. He is a great orator ; a model of toleration and good sense ; second to no ecclesiastic in Europe for the beauty of his pulpit compositions.” See Article V. of the 8th volume of Henry

* There are no exact equivalents in English for these German names of Ecclesiastical office. The term *Dean* employed by M. Wendeborn, (see the note in page 82. of Mr. Rennell's book,) is not correct. The word dignitary is used in the title page, as generally expressive of the meaning of the original names.

Maty's New Review, for the year 1786, beginning at page 97. The title of the article is, " Charactere Teutscher Dichter und Prosaisten von Kaiser Karl dem Grossen bis aufs Jahr 1780, 2 vols. 8vo. Berlin, 1781."

According to Meusel, in his " Gelehrte Teutschland," Spalding resigned all his situations in 1788, being then 74 years old, and retired into private life. He lived, however, sixteen years longer, and died at or near Berlin, the 22d of May, 1804, wanting only five months and seven days of completing his 90th year.

WE prefix the following passages, because we think they bear strong testimony to the usefulness of M. Spalding's work. They are taken from "Dr. Munter's Narrative of the Conversion of Count Struensee, translated from the German by the Rev. Mr. Wendeborn in 1774, and republished with an Introduction and Notes by Thomas Rennell, B. D. Vicar of Kensington."

I (Dr. Munter) brought him (Struensee) Spalding's book on the Value of Inward Feelings in Christianity. I told him, that I hoped the reading of it would make religion appear in a still more amiable light, when he found how much it was adapted to the human soul, and stood not in need of effects without a cause. He answered, "This is what I hope likewise. I remember very well how much many, perhaps well intended sermons which I heard at Halle, confirmed my unbelief. It was too plain to me, that those things which were told me there could not be truths revealed by God,

though it was confidently asserted that they were.” Pages 82, 83.

He had now finished Spalding’s book on the Value of Inward Feelings in Christianity. He returned me thanks for having given it to him, and added, “ My ideas of that reformation in man which is to be brought about by conversion are greatly rectified by this book. I own with joy, I find Christianity more amiable the more I get acquainted with it. I never knew it before. I was offended when God was always represented to me as an angry, jealous judge, who is much pleased when he has an opportunity of showing his revenge, though I knew he was love itself; and am now convinced, that though he must punish, yet he takes no kind of delight in it, and is rather for pardoning. That without Christ there was no salvation, was the only truth which served for a subject in all sermons, and this was repeated over and over again in synonymous expressions ; but it was never set in its true light, and never properly proved. I saw people cry at church ; but after their tears were dried up, I found them in their actions not in the least better, but rather allowing themselves licence in every transgression, upon the

X SOME ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR.

privilege of being faithful believers. Lastly, I could not comprehend those inward feelings which many Christians pretend to have. It appeared to me unnatural and miraculous. Nevertheless, it has made me uneasy during our acquaintance, that I have found nothing of these inward feelings ; and I believe you have observed my uneasiness. I found my real sorrow for my sins not adequate to those expressions which I had heard frequently in my youth, and which had terrified me so much. I endeavoured to heighten my grief to such a degree ; but I saw, on the other side, that this forcing myself by means of imagination was not that grief I sought for, or what might have pleased God. Spalding's book has satisfied me on this account. I am now sure, that the chief point is a confidence in God through Christ, and a true reformation of mind from what is bad to what is good. I myself can find out and be sensible whether I have this confidence, and I myself am able to judge whether such a reformation has taken place in my mind." Pages 113, 114, 115, 116, of the Third Edition. See also pages 79 and 232 of the same book.

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

PREFACES TO THE DIFFERENT EDITIONS.

IT would be a source of very great satisfaction to the writer of these sheets, if they should at all contribute, on the one hand, to clear religion from ill-grounded imputations; and, on the other, to operate full conviction, and to awaken effectual impressions of a concern which is of the last importance to the welfare of mankind. If it be incalculably mischievous, so to surround religion with thorns as to increase the difficulty of its entrance, while at the same time many an opening is made, where there ought to be none, by which men are led astray to their utmost

peril ; it is, on the other side, most ardently to be desired, that the religion which reason approves, and the conscience feels to be indispensable, should be allowed its complete and unrestrained influence over the human affections and the life. What can be more excellent, than that the mind should dwell, with due reflection and sincerity, on the mild lessons of religious and moral truth ? What more happy, than a life spent in the love and fear of God, in close accordance with that amended nature, which derives its origin from God ? What more blest, than such a preparation for the future world, as does by no means preclude the innocent, peaceful, cheerful enjoyment of what is allowably pleasant in our passage through the present ? Only, then, can the soul of man feel its proper dignity and worth, when it is able, on good grounds, to account unto itself for

the whole of its conduct and affections. And who shall be able to do this, but those that have chosen God Almighty for their portion? Conscious of the happiness of their own condition, it will be their endeavour to draw the attention of their fellow-creatures to this their only proper worth and welfare, by awakening such assured convictions, as cannot fail of approving themselves to the heart and understanding of every thinking being.

The estimate of the value of feelings in religion is a subject that comprehends much more than will be found in these sheets. But it was the author's design to consider the subject in one point of view alone; namely, in so far as feelings are taken for the perceptible operation of supernatural grace, and as indispensable marks of repentance and conversion. In order to obviate misconception, discuss-

sions have sometimes been introduced of a more philosophical nature than was desirable in a work intended, not so much for persons of abstract thought, as of plain understandings in general. The same reason has given occasion to some repetitions of the same ideas. The author does, however, indulge the hope, that he may not have entirely fallen short of his object, in removing many a misconception, and depriving many an objection of its force : that all should be removed, is more than can be expected. It falls to the lot of only a few extraordinary minds, to shed upon human knowledge such a flood of perfect light, and to enrich it with such decisive speculations, as must be acknowledged for undeniable truth. Others must be contented with having made some small contributions to the diffusion of knowledge ; and must leave it to time to determine, how far those

are admissible, and may be useful. The truth and importance of any opinion will never be established by any excessive vehemence in the manner of enforcing it. Cool and lengthened examination will always be the best means of ascertaining any opinion to be true, and of recommending it, as such, to the acceptance of a sound understanding. Let it be stated with all possible clearness, together with the grounds upon which it rests. What this shall not be able to effect, will never be effected by declamation and heated controversy. It must, however, be expected, that any departure from men's long-accustomed modes of thinking should, too often, be met with ill-temper instead of argument on their part; and this with the less restraint, the more they value themselves on a fancied antiquity in their possession of what they call the truth. At the same time they most unceremoniously charge their opponents

with an intentional resistance to that truth which they denominate evident ; thus completely begging the question, and adducing not the smallest proof of so serious a charge. So it always has been, and we must make our account that so it always will be, in a greater or less degree. The absence of candour is a great enemy to knowledge, especially to religious knowledge. It were always well, to lay more stress on proof and argument than on abuse ; and, where right and wrong are the matters in dispute, the application should be made not to the passions, but to the understanding and the reason. Theological controversy, if such there must be, would then assume a very different aspect, and would promise more utility than is generally found to be derived from it. But, as this is more to be desired than to be expected, the lover of truth must rest satisfied with the testimony of his conscience ; and only be-

ware of increasing the ill-temper of his opponent by his own. Truth will be sure to stand its ground, or to re-appear, without any other aid than that of its own evidence and strength.

Two things the author has much at heart ; and it would grieve him that their truth should be disputed, or that their importance should not make its due impression. In the first place, the express testimony of Holy Writ, and the uniform doctrine of the church of Christ, pronounce every change to good in the soul of man to be effected by the grace of God, through the instrumentality of the Word alone,—that is, through those truths of religion which are contained in the Scriptures when they are duly acknowledged and received, and through just apprehensions of those truths. In the second place, the unfeigned acceptance of divine convictions, and obedience to

them, producing purity and rectitude of heart and affections, and a thorough amendment of the life,—these constitute the essential business of religion on the part of man, and his best preparation for the world to come. It is the author's hope, that both these points are placed beyond dispute in the present work. It is evident, that the gospel loses nothing by their establishment, but is, on the contrary, a great gainer. The whole work of man's salvation is no less ascribed solely to the grace of God: the difference lies in its mode of operation. In the author's system, that operation takes place by the instrumentality of the Word, —that is, by the powerful effect which the grace of God imparts to the motives unto a holy life, derived from the promises, the threatenings, the warnings, the persuasions which occur in Holy Writ. In the system which sets forth the grace

of God as consisting in a course of supernatural influences, entirely perceptible by what that system calls inward feelings and experiences, it is not only possible, but almost unavoidable, to be led into error, when we consider the frame and character of the human mind. This is proved by innumerable examples of enthusiasm, the mischiefs of which have invariably arisen from mistaken notions on this most important subject. No such mischief can be feared, from the highest value that can be set upon that purity and rectitude of heart and life, which are effected by the grace of God through the Word ; nor is the attention thereby withdrawn from any thing that can be fancied more important. Here is no sacrifice to pride or conscious merit. The good man will not arrogate his frame of mind as his own work, nor presume to found thereupon any claim to reward,

no more than a subject from his sovereign for that state of health which the beneficent appointments of that sovereign has enabled him to recover and to retain. The mischief is thus avoided, of substituting any other process of conversion for a sanctified heart, and an amended life ; a mischief that utterly frustrates the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Purity of heart and affections, and thorough amendment of the life, are the paramount objects of the religion of Christ. Of these we must never for a moment lose sight, in all discussions of religious opinions ; of which they are the true and infallible touchstone.

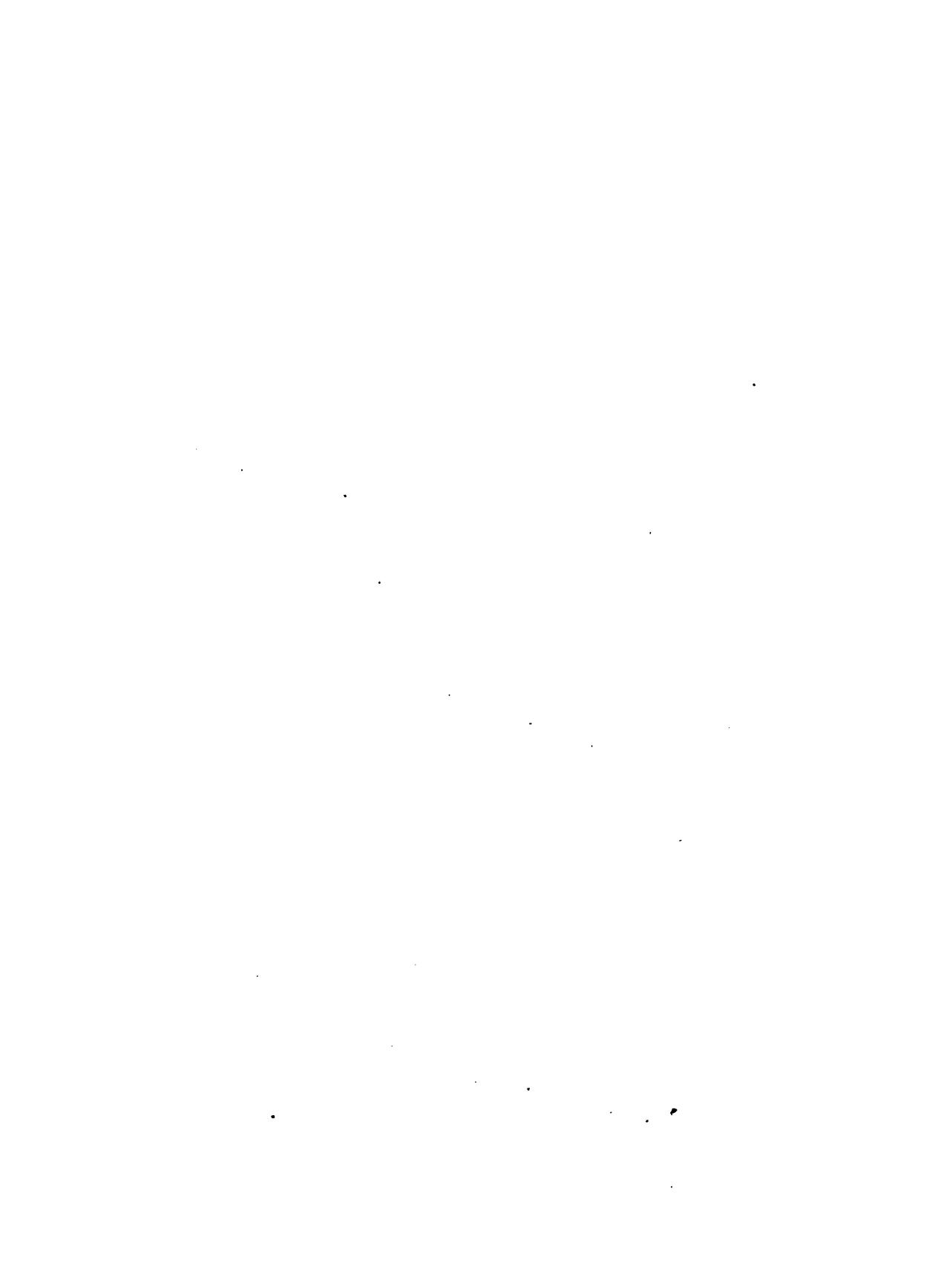
The author conceives, that no sort of danger to true religion is to be apprehended from the statements contained in this work. The only danger that can arise from them is the following ;—that certain notions which had been familiar to

certain persons, and had been highly cherished by them, must be given up as inadmissible ; or, at least, must lose much of the importance hitherto attached to them. A candid examination of the grounds of their preconceived opinions would probably induce many persons, who will not be pleased with the contents of these pages, to form a more favourable judgment of them, and to discover them to be much nearer to the truth than was previously supposed.

But, whatever may be the fate of the work, the author feels perfectly unconcerned. He has neither parties nor individuals in view. It is, however, too true to be denied, that erroneous notions and mistaken modes of religious guidance do exist, and are so prevalent as to demand a public notice. Such notice is the object of this work ; and it stands in need of no other plea for its publication.

With the most unfeigned veneration for the inestimable gospel of Jesus Christ ; with the most conscientious guard over his own feelings and reflections ; with an unremitting consciousness of the presence of Almighty God, in which presence he is writing ; with the conviction, unremittingly renewed, of the account that he must, perhaps very shortly, deliver in ; with all these views, and under all these impressions, the author trusts, that he shall neither be accused by his own conscience as culpable in respect of this work, nor be considered by any reasonable persons as doing any thing injurious to the cause of religion. Those who will not reason must be left to their own judgments, however harsh and uncandid they may be ; and however characterized by vehemence of passion, or by artful insinuation. But their influence will not be durable nor extensive ;

while the judgment of truth will last for ever. Besides, the honest purpose of labouring to support the real dignity and beneficial influence of true religion, will always find its proper and full reward within itself. Much to be lamented is any writer on subjects of theology, who does not feel within him enough of that reward to satisfy his conscience, and to give him peace of mind.



C O N T E N T S.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

	Page
THE doctrine of religious experiences claims particular attention - - - - -	1
Experiences in religion are necessary - - - - -	2
Difference of opinion on their nature - - - - -	3
Importance of the inquiry - - - - -	6
Scripture, and a due knowledge of human nature, are the proper guides - - - - -	7
A sound understanding, and a well-disposed mind, are sufficient - - - - -	8

FIRST PART.

Can the work of the Holy Spirit be distinguished by the feelings alone from the natural changes in the human mind? - - - - -	11
Effect of dreams in this respect - - - - -	12
It may be good - - - - -	13
The influence of grace is not denied - - - - -	14
Two opinions on its operation - - - - -	ib.
Illustration from the gravitation of matter - - - - -	15
Insufficiency of the appeal to experience - - - - -	16
Vehement impressions no proof - - - - -	17

	Page
They may exist without divine influence	- 18
Effects of natural temperament	- 19
And of previous expectation	- 20
Erroneous appeal to Scripture	- 21
Romans, viii. 16.	- 22
Romans, v. 5.	- 27
Romans, xv. 13.	- 28
Romans, viii. 14.	- 29
Galatians, iv. 5.	- ib.
Philippians, iv. 7.	- 30
2 Corinth. i. 21. Eph. i. 13. iv. 30.	- 31
1 Peter, ii. 3.	- 34
Hebrews, vi. 4, 5.	- ib.
Psalm xxxiv. 9.	- ib.
There are reasons against expecting any such decisive criterion	- 35
It would more probably be found in the superior powers of the mind	- ib.
No proof from sudden additional knowledge	- 36
This is not unusual in human science	- ib.
No inconsistence in prayer for spiritual knowledge	37
Less probable in the inferior powers	- 39
No authority from Scripture	- 40
Which says that grace operates meditately through the Word	- 41
In mediate influences, the medium or means alone is felt	- 43
Superiority of feelings that arise from knowledge	- 45
In feeble minds the good tendency of feelings deserves regard	- 46
The Word operates without any previous improvement of nature	- 48

CONTENTS.

xxvii

	Page
Insufficiency of the illustration from a diseased eye	49
More correct illustration from the diseased eye	50
Effect of the Word of God	51
Certainty of divine influence is best derived from the tendency of the feelings	52
All good feelings come from God	53
Authority of divines	54
Attention necessary to the beneficial tendency of our feelings on our lives and actions	61
Otherwise, all knowledge and feelings are useless	65
No necessity of anxious noticing what is extraor- dinary in our feelings	67
Illustration from light	68
No supernatural influences are to be expected in what regards our temporal concerns	71
Mischief of imagining an opposition between nature and grace	78
They are closely united	ib.
The union of nature and grace is no nourishment to human pride	85
Nor any disparagement to divine grace	89
Result of the whole argument	90

SECOND PART.

Are feelings necessary to repentance and religion,— at least, to certify the existence of these ; and how far are they so ?	93
Man was made to please God, and so to be happy by inward order, purity, and innocence	94
Sin makes man miserable by destroying order, purity, and innocence	96
The divine displeasure completes that misery	ib.

	Page
But the gospel offers consolation	99
The convictions of the gospel determine the nature and degree in religious feelings	ib.
Scripture teaches that the essence of repentance is change of heart and life	100
A powerful sense of personal guilt is indispensable	101
Difference in moral depravity, and therefore in the feelings that have reference to it	107
But, in every case, the sense of guilt must be accom- panied with shame and self-reproach	108
Mistaken notions of divine wrath	109
Divine goodness a more reasonable cause of fear	112
Repentant sorrow springs from a just sense of moral evil, considered in itself, and as it deserves the divine displeasure	119
The hope of pardon is simultaneous with the fear of punishment, and allays it	124
The sense of mercy, and of the means of deliver- ance, tends to create repentance	128
Narrow limits of the human faculties the cause of excessive terrors in repentance	132
Yet rational sorrow secures amendment	133
Our debt of gratitude to the Redeemer is infinite	136
Gross images of his person to be avoided	139
It is possible that they may be harmless	140
But they may be very hurtful	142
Different effect of the same figures and forms of speech in different languages, times, and nations	144
What is meant by going to Christ to be sanctified and amended?	145
Christ's influence is not distinct from that of the Holy Spirit	146

	Page
Christ has no peculiar and separate dealings with the human heart - - - - -	148
Mischief of a groundless opposition imagined be- tween God the Father and the Redeemer Christ - - - - -	152
The Father is as early inclined to mercy as the Son - - - - -	155
Moral amendment is too much undervalued - - - - -	156
False illustration from a criminal - - - - -	157
True illustration - - - - -	159
False illustration from an invalid - - - - -	161
True state of the case - - - - -	163
Erroneous opinion respecting the source of moral righteousness - - - - -	166
The power to will depends either upon the scale of being - - - - -	167
Or upon the strength of motives - - - - -	ib.
Illustration from an irritable man - - - - -	168
Powerful motives from the gospel - - - - -	171
Other motives are not to be rejected - - - - -	172
Necessary connection between inward amendment and the desire of pardon - - - - -	174
Illustrated by a comparison - - - - -	175
Application of the comparison - - - - -	178
Erroneous notion with respect to prayer for grace and mercy - - - - -	179
Prayer for mere gratifying sensations not justifiable - - - - -	188
What is to be understood by its being difficult to have faith - - - - -	189
Not the sincerity, but the necessity of the religious feelings in question is disputed - - - - -	193
Prayer to God is more necessary under anxious feelings - - - - -	198
To fix the precise time of the spiritual change is	

CONTENTS.

	Page
not necessary in all cases ; but in some it is unavoidable	200
It cannot be a general rule	203
It may be claimed without foundation	207
Moral righteousness is the only sure criterion of divine acceptance	208
Moral righteousness consists not merely in outward acts, but in the entire direction of the will to goodness	210
It is often misrepresented	211
Repentance and faith must never be considered as distinct from moral righteousness	214
Commencing righteousness must precede divine acceptance	215
No death-bed repentance without a thorough change of heart and affections	220
No precise number of virtuous acts required to ascertain this change	225
No merit in moral righteousness	229
Yet it is unjustifiable to deprecate it under a show of humility	231
Moral righteousness is not man's own work	235
No fear lest men should be taught to amend themselves	237
All amendment is the work of God	244
No use in keeping journals of feelings and experiences	245
If they are kept at all, they should be registers of improvement in moral conduct and good affections	246
Conclusion, that feelings and experiences are not of essential importance	248
No necessity of two criterions	249

CONTENTS.

xxxii

	Page
A life of godliness is the only true criterion	- 250
Gratitude for Christ's redemption	- 250

THIRD PART.

First cause of the common reception of the doctrine of feelings is human indolence	- 253
The next is admiration of what is extraordinary	- 254
Third, the prevalence of irreligion and vice	- 255
Fourth, a notion of future refuge in such a religion	256
Ill effects of this system	- 258
Answer to the assertion of the superior efficacy of this system	- 260
The passions are not to be excited in Christian preaching	- 263
Little advantage of such excitements	- 266
More judicious way of preaching	- 268
Proper commendation of a sermon	- 269
Courage in professing our religion	- ib.
Especially in ecclesiastics	- 272
And charity	- 273
And forbearance from ridicule	- ib.
But argument is not precluded	- 274
Ignorance and prejudice not entitled to attention	- ib.
Better expectation from persons of learning	- 275
Result on the one side	- ib.
Result on the other side	- 276
Conclusion	- 277

PRELIMINARY

OBSERVATIONS.

To those who seriously desire to see mankind brought by religion into the right road to happiness, it cannot be indifferent to observe the diversity of modes by which they are conducted. To persons of no religion at all this diversity must operate as an objection, at least as a hinderance to its acceptance: and these can be no otherwise removed than by clear interpretation, which may reduce the question to what is universally essential. The mode of religious in-

2 PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

struction to which we are going particularly to advert in the following sheets, is that which attributes such pre-eminent importance to feelings and experiences.

Yet we by no means except against religious experiences in general. We think that no man can be truly religious who does not experience the effects of his religion. Whosoever owns a God, a providence, a world to come, must be conscious of certain feelings awakened in his mind by the reception of these doctrines, if that reception be sincere. Admiration, love, and joy, shame and sorrow for his sins, anxious fear of their consequences, hope and confidence, and the manifold emotions created by the lessons of religion ; these the awakened sinner will doubtless feel in a greater or a less degree, according to the particular conformation of his mind. Those who know nothing of such feelings, must be

strangers to all excitement to a good life, to the cheering consolations and internal rewards of faith and holiness. Religious knowledge can no otherwise be operative in us, influencing the will, urging to exertion, and inspiring comfort, except we bring it into close reflection, and, by that means, into a state of feeling. It will be valuable, in reference to its proper object, only so far as we are conscious of deriving from it motive, amendment, and consolation. In this point of view, nothing can be said against the religion of feeling and experience: it would be the greatest misfortune to be wanting in it. But the nature of such feelings, their use, and value, is another, and a very different question.

Books and sermons are by no means agreed upon the proper mode of teaching mankind how to be good, and consequently happy. All admit, at least in

4 PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

name, a general order, expressly revealed; and men are directed to pursue it. Repentance, faith, and a good life are taught by all. There are, however, persons who, with reason, laying the foundation of holiness in the inward frame and affections of the heart, are induced to watch with anxious solicitude every feeling and emotion of their minds, and to dwell upon them with the utmost earnestness: while others, without excluding the inward affections of the heart, are accustomed to pay more attention to just and clear views in religion, and a correspondent practice in the life. By the former class of persons inward experiences are exalted into pre-eminent, and almost exclusive consideration. These experiences consist in feelings of a passionate character: the mind is affected by them in various ways, in the several stages of its spiritual change. This

terror now, and in the sequel that relief is felt, and carefully noticed ; and these impressions are so striking, as to enable the individual to state in all future time the precise moment of his change. The principal, and often the only certain marks of true religion and the divine favour, are made to consist in these impressions. Those alone are considered to be real Christians who can state this process respecting themselves, and describe it in every minute particular. Books, whose object is the amendment of mankind, and discourses from the pulpit, are judged of and valued, only as they are characterized by this mode of instruction.

Such is our representation of this matter ; and we trust that it is impartial. We have only been desirous of stating it clearly, to assist the judgment of those who unite with us in a sincere inquiry

6 PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

into truth. The subject will be more fully explained and determined in the sequel.

We conceive this inquiry to be of extreme importance, because it involves the question, whether certain peculiar feelings are indispensable to please God, and to save the soul. If they are indispensable, he that is a stranger to them is a stranger to religion, and is reprobate in the sight of God. If they are not necessary, then to maintain the affirmative is to impose an odious and heavy burden on religion, and to pronounce a most uncharitable judgment on those who are not conscious of them. Their absence may afflict and terrify the best of men ; while their presence may give false security to the worst ; and that to their imminent peril. It is therefore incumbent upon us to come as near to certainty as possible, for the benefit of those who, as the great import-

ance of the thing demands, are desirous of attaining to a satisfied state of mind in their intercourse with their Maker.

And this certainty is not of such difficult attainment as may be imagined. Scripture states with sufficient clearness what is to effect the restoration and amendment of the human race ; but its information is to be admitted only according to just rules of interpretation. Farther, a knowledge of human nature, built upon experience, is also necessary, to teach us to avoid the errors of an extravagant imagination. This knowledge is a part of God's earliest revelation : it is imparted to us by our reason, and is not annulled by Scripture. The Creator has established primary laws to regulate the changes that take place in the human mind ; and unless he has expressly declared that he means to depart from them, and in what instances, by the su-

pernatural operations of his grace, we are justified in suspecting those experiences which are inconsistent with these laws. That unconstrained interpretation of Scripture, which is consistent with the original constitution of our nature, is always to be received in preference to any other that excludes it. With regard to repentance and amendment, we are not to assent to any theory which is built upon insulated passages of Scripture, capable in their connection of a very different meaning, or upon certain assumed dogmas, which cannot be brought to the test of common sense. In this inquiry, an understanding naturally sound and a well-disposed mind are quite sufficient. He that is serious in his religion, and duly reflects upon the purpose of his being, will of course be desirous of ascertaining what ought to take place with regard to him ; and what he ought to be,

to secure an interest in the happiness which religion promises. This knowledge may be attained by the honest searching of the Scriptures, and the diligent study of our own hearts. All men have laid before them the grounds of that necessary knowledge by which they must be guided. It is to facilitate the attainment of this necessary knowledge, that the following observations are directed.



FIRST PART.

THE feelings which are considered by many persons to be indispensable in the commencement and the progress of the religious life cannot be too highly appreciated, if it be true that they are the immediate work of God, and that the sensation alone enables us to ascertain the supernatural impression of the Holy Spirit, and to distinguish them from the variations which nature produces in the human mind. This then is our first inquiry. Persons occupied with religious thoughts experience from time to time a peculiar anxiety of mind, or an extra-

ordinary cheerfulness of spirits ; which they, therefore, take to be the immediate work of God himself, totally distinct from, and superior to any thing derived from the ordinary, natural powers of the human mind. We are to examine, whether they are justified in forming this conclusion. Perhaps there are not many who will assert the affirmative expressly. Yet in many works that detail the guidings of divine grace it is stated as a principle, that the operations of the Deity in the mind of man may be traced, and distinguished by means of the feeling itself. When dreams also are of a peculiar character, and have made a particular impression, they are raised above the rank of natural effects, and are taken for an especial operation of Almighty God. Persons of good sense, indeed, even among the advocates of feeling, are embarrassed how to defend the judgment

of these dreamers. There is, however, no other way of getting rid of the difficulty, except by fixing the limits and criteria of what is natural, and what is beyond nature in our mental impressions ; and so to obviate the appeal which will otherwise be made to individual, inward experiences. Yet we do not deny that dreams may make very wholesome impressions upon the human mind. If they bring men to reflect upon themselves, and to form good resolutions in consequence, dreams are then an efficient means, in the hand of Providence, for awakening the sinner to repentance ; and every instance where that effect has been produced, is to be gratefully acknowledged. The laws of the imagination, which give rise to dreams, derive their origin from God ; and whatever good they do is to be ascribed to him. But it does not follow, that the strong impres-

sions which take place in dreams are to be ranked with real inspirations, and to be distinguished from the ordinary course of nature. With regard to other powerful, and often sudden religious feelings, it is usual to conclude from that intensity, or their sudden excitement, or some other peculiar quality, that they do not belong to nature ; but are in a pre-eminent manner derived from God.

We begin by declaring, that we entirely admit the influence of divine grace. Repentance and amendment come from God ; and to him is due all the praise of their production. We say, that with those truths which are to effect our amendment there is always united an especial operation of the Holy Spirit, which carries their conviction home. On the nature of this influence there are two opinions. Some think that it has been originally imparted to the truths of reve-

lation, bestowing that moral force which makes these truths effectual, where they are not obstinately resisted. Others think this influence not originally inherent in the word, but always attending it in every occurring instance. The influence is, however, still the work of God, and its effect the same upon the soul of man : and it would be very uncharitable in the advocates of the latter opinion, to consider those who hold the former to be incapable of that good effect. There is a similar difference of opinion on the subject of the gravitation of matter ; some holding it to be the effect of the Almighty's omnipotence in every particular instance ; while others take it to be the result of powers vested in the nature of matter from the first. But whichever of the two opinions is the true one, man with the rest of matter still takes his part in all the movements of

nature, and feels the power of gravity. In either case, the effects of gravity in nature's operations will furnish equal occasion to the good man for prayer and thanksgiving, for fear and reverence towards the God of nature, the first cause of all such effects. This question may therefore well remain at rest, as of no real consequence to man's salvation. We have said, that for our own part we maintain the especial influence of divine grace, accompanying the truths by which we are to be awakened and reformed ; but we at the same time maintain, that this influence cannot be distinguished as supernatural by means of the mere feeling ; and this position it is our design to prove.

The principal stress is laid upon experience. Experience certainly furnishes in general the surest grounds of knowledge ; and we are not to wonder, that persons confidently appeal to what they

have felt as incapable of refutation. And they are so far right; for no one can deny their having felt. But the question still remains, what have they felt? They have found their minds disposed, and their hearts affected in a very peculiar manner. They have been filled with anxieties and terrors; and these have been followed by remarkable relief, and joy, and comfort. In the sequel, feelings of a religious nature have habitually occupied their minds with very extraordinary force. It would certainly be folly to deny the existence of these experiences. It is not their reality, but their cause and origin which are here in question. Can the cause and origin be felt? Can we know with certainty that these joys and terrors are supernaturally produced? Among the proofs which are commonly adduced, are the extraordinary vehemence, and the

ravishing impression of such feelings. But it must first be proved that these can proceed from no other cause. If this cannot be done, other grounds must be produced; undoubted testimonies that what is thus felt is, in such peculiar circumstances and cases, really a work of God. We are now to inquire what can be said in support of either argument.

It is a well-known fact, that, where divine influence is entirely out of the question, images of extreme vivacity, and very powerful feelings, may arise in the human mind. We know what transporting or overwhelming thoughts are excited by some concern of near importance to our interests; and that no limits can be prescribed to such sensations. Yet it cannot be clearly shown how those feelings are created; nor can the gradations be ascertained by which the mind is raised to such a pitch of vehemence.

We only know that nature possesses this creative power ; but how it operates remains a secret.

It is farther certain, that the intensity of such feelings is not a little assisted in many persons by their natural temperament of body or mind. The imagination comes near to truth and fact in its creations ; and men believe they actually see, what exists only in the fancy. The internal instruments of sense and thought are in such persons so elastic, as to be violently set at work by impressions which have little or no influence on other men : they find something beyond nature in every thing that powerfully moves them. The fancy thus often gains an undue, disgraceful, and even pernicious ascendancy over the reason and the judgment. A person tells us, with much seriousness, that in his walks he feels as if he were bathing in the ocean of divine

love ; or that with every respiration he draws in the sweet savour of the love of Christ. If this be meant merely as a forcible description of the consciousness of divine love, its deplorable absence of the faculty of judgment may, by great indulgence on our part, be overlooked. But when it is given as a serious and regular account of the experienced guidings of God's grace, it betrays an utter want of common sense.

We shall less wonder at the intensity to which religious feelings often rise, when we consider that many persons from preconceived notions stand prepared for something out of nature. They watch with anxiety every mental emotion ; and if there be any thing unusual it is immediately taken for divine. This discovery still farther heats the fancy ; the impression becomes more intense ; it is rapidly augmented in its

vehemence ; and then serves as an additional proof of its divine origin. And now, who can prescribe any limits to this process of the imagination ? What extravagance may not be expected, when preconceived notions are combined with a temperament of mind and body by nature impassioned and warm ? We are not justified, therefore, in making the intensity of any religious feeling an argument that it arises from a supernatural cause.

We are next referred to Scripture. This does indeed expressly and uniformly assert the operation of divine grace, in man's repentance and reformation. It is God that awakens the penitent, and brings him into an altered frame of mind ; it is "God that worketh in him both to will and to do." But the question still remains, how this operation can be distinguished from the natural vari-

ations in the human mind. If Scripture furnishes any positive criterion, it must be admitted; otherwise we must suspend our judgment.

One of the strongest proofs adduced from Scripture are these words of St. Paul, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."^a Here it is alleged, we have a witness extraneous to our own spirit; and it is by our feeling solely that we admit and understand its testimony, and ascertain that it comes immediately from God. But if we grant, that the spirit mentioned by the apostle means the divine person of the Holy Ghost, yet the words "beareth witness with" (*συμμαρτυρεῖ*) require no other meaning than that of assurance and confirmation; which always take place, when the Holy Spirit, by creating the fruits of faith in a life of

^a Rom. viii. 16.

piety and virtue, infuses peace and comfort into the good man's mind. It is the Holy Spirit which enables him to acquire those good affections, and to perform those good actions, of which he could only form the ineffectual wish while he was under the bondage of the law.^b It is the same Spirit which overcomes the indolence of the carnal mind, and, by completing the work of our renovation and amendment, bestows upon us the surest proof of our adoption by Almighty God. That no other inward assurance indispensable to be felt is here signified appears to us to be entirely manifest. Bishop Sherlock, taking the witnessing Spirit in the text to be the Holy Spirit, expresses himself in the following manner^c: "Hence it appears, that the evidence of the Spirit is not any secret

^b Rom. vii. 15.

^c Bp. Sherlock's Sermons, vol. i. p. 247. 5th edit. London, 1764.

inspiration, or any assurance conveyed to the mind of the faithful, but it is the evidence of works, such as by the Spirit we perform ; and therefore the only sign of sanctification is holiness, and the only mark of grace is to obey from the heart the word of God ; and therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who, from this or the like passages, imagine that the Spirit ever gives, or ever was designed to give, inward assurance or certainty to men of their final state.”

Still less could this be the apostle’s meaning, if by the Spirit that beareth witness he had not the Spirit of God in view. The word spirit is of very various signification in Holy Writ. It sometimes means the miraculous powers which established the truth of the Gospel ; sometimes the doctrines and system of Christianity, as it stands opposed to the Mosaic economy ; sometimes the corre-

sponding frame of mind of the Christian professor; sometimes several of these notions combined: it cannot, therefore, be confined exclusively to the Holy Ghost. We, for our part, consider the proper sense of the passage under consideration to be, a prevailing frame of mind. Mention was just made of the spirit of bondage, to which the apostle opposes the spirit of adoption, which is evidently the same with the "Spirit that beareth witness with our spirit," which immediately follows. The spirit of bondage certainly cannot mean a person, but plainly signifies a frame of mind; and the "spirit of adoption" must be taken in the same sense. This consists in filial love to God and to the Redeemer Christ, created by the doctrines and promises of the Gospel, and is opposed to the slavish fear impressed by the yoke of the law of Moses. It is a consciousness of willing

self-devotion to God and the Saviour, amounting to an assurance of a share in the divine adoption. This spirit of adoption, this filial feeling, bestows upon our spirit, that is, upon ourselves, the testimony of our union and communion with the Deity. It need not be thought strange, that the spirit which exists in man, and is his most essential quality, should be taken here as separated from him, and as bearing testimony to him. We find the same language in Scripture in reference to conscience; “their conscience also bearing witness^d;” “my conscience also bearing me witness.”^e In this concurrent testimony it is therefore unnecessary to suppose two distinct intelligent beings, the Spirit of God and the soul of man. It is merely the testimony of God’s favour here and of final happiness hereafter, given to the man himself,

^d Rom. ii. 15.

^e Rom. ix. 1.

or, as the Scripture expresses it, to his spirit, arising from his pious and virtuous course of life and affections.

The following passage comes next to be considered: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, through the Holy Spirit."^f By this we are, doubtless, to understand the joyful certainty of God's merciful disposition towards us. This certainty, the apostle says, is given us by the Holy Spirit; and was particularly imparted to the first believers in the name of Christ, by means of the spiritual benefits, gifts, and powers which were bestowed pre-eminently upon them. These were a manifest proof that God was among them with his grace, entertaining the most gracious purposes towards them; and that they might expect from him the choicest blessings, and the most perfect happiness hereafter.

^f Rom. v. 5.

The apostle says in another place, “ Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.”^s Here we see, that these feelings are to be awakened by “ believing,” by faith, by a lively and convincing knowledge: their origin is, therefore, not immediate. Yet they are still the work of God, being produced by his word, by the doctrines of the Gospel, by those motives, arguments, and persuasions, which are contained in Scripture, or are certainly deduced from it. When the doctrines of the Gospel are so clearly understood as to convey a correspondent feeling to the mind, they are infallibly accompanied with the most heartfelt comfort; and the result will be a confident assurance of what God will do for us hereafter, according to his promise.

^s Rom. xv. 13.

The opinion in question does not derive more support from another passage of St. Paul: “ As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”^h The persons here spoken of are those who are guided by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of sanctification; and obey that guidance. Their inclinations, purposes, and actions, flow from a frame of mind created by the grace of God, and conformable to his will. They are, therefore, in possession of the distinguishing criterion of God’s children. We find the same phrase repeated in precisely the same sense in another epistle of St. Paul: “ But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.”ⁱ

Neither is there any more difficulty in these words, “ ^k The Spirit of the Son, which God hath sent into the hearts”

^h Rom. viii. 14.

ⁱ Gal. v. 18.

^k Gal. iv. 6. compared with Rom. viii. 15.

of believers, “ whereby they cry, *Abba, Father.*” The Spirit of God, be its operation what it may, raises the heart, by means of the Gospel promises, to such a pitch of joyful confidence, that we may, with the same filial affection as Christ himself, call God our Father. This is the full sense of the apostle’s language; which by no means implies our being able to distinguish these effects as supernatural by mere sensation.

Another passage of the apostle is sometimes quoted: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”¹ If the peace of God means that inward tranquillity which is created by our perfect resignation to the Divine will, the truths and promises of the Gospel are fully sufficient to produce this effect. This tranquillity may well

¹ Phil. iv. 7.

be said to pass all understanding, because in excellence and in actual gratification it exceeds all conception that can be formed by those who have never felt it ; and it is unattainable by any human means whatsoever. But if the phrase be a Hebrew idiom, and the peace of God signify his favour, and the manifold benefits derived from him, especially those of a spiritual nature, then the question would not be of any inward feelings at all ; and still what is said of the excellence of this peace will be no less true.

The epistles often speak of a “ sealing^m” of the faithful through the Holy Ghost. From this expression it is argued, that there are feelings which decidedly prove themselves to be the work of God, and are a certain assurance of his favour and our final happiness. There is a remarkable propensity in many persons to

^m 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 13. iv. 30.

wrest the figurative and allegorical modes of speech in Scripture, without hesitation, into supernatural and mysterious doctrines, though they are capable of an unforced and coherent interpretation, which will by no means disturb the order of things once established by the Deity. General inferences are likewise drawn from language which is applicable solely to particular circumstances. By the former practice a most extravagant sense has been given to poetical passages ; which, by our increased acquaintance with eastern phraseology and its bold figures, are reduced to very natural and intelligible notions. By the latter, many phrases of the apostles are perverted and obscured, which are perfectly clear when the scope of the writer is considered, together with the particular circumstances and histories of the persons or the churches to which they are addressed.

This error converts the “sealing” of the apostle into a general, supernatural work of grace, which is still unceasingly extended to all the faithful, and, by a feeling which outsteps the whole power of nature, convinces every believing individual that he stands in the adoption of God. But more attention to the drift of the apostle will refer us solely to the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in the first days of the church. All the circumstances, and the entire connection, give the preference to this interpretation. It would be too tedious to shew this at large in every instance: the attentive reader of the Scriptures will doubtless have discovered this to be the fact. Others may for better conviction consult “commentators of approved judgment, and of sound critical knowledge. They will thereby learn to avoid any gross and

ⁿ See Hammond, Beausobre, Michælis.

mysterious notions of the phrase in question ; and never in any case to transform metaphors into articles of faith and doctrine.

It remains to consider briefly the word “taste” in the following passages : “if ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious,” “and have tasted the heavenly gift,” “and have tasted the good word of the Lord.” The word “taste” signifies in Scripture language a strong persuasion founded upon evidence ; unless the context shews it to mean the power of working miracles. It is in the former sense that we are to understand the exhortation of the Psalmist, “O taste and see that the Lord is good^r;” because the context refers to the visible benefits and deliverances of God’s providence : the same may be said of the quotation from St. Peter. But the latter meaning

* 1 Peter, ii. 3. Heb. vi. 4, 5. ^p Psalm xxxiv. 8.

must indisputably be given to the quotations from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We have thus gone through some of the principal passages of Holy Writ, which are adduced to support the doctrine in question, and have found them entirely inadequate to the purpose. But it is not enough to shew that there are no arguments to support that doctrine : we are farther to state the actual grounds, and powerful reasons against our expecting from our feelings any decisive criterion of supernatural influence.

If the work of God in man's repentance and amendment be so distinct from the mind's ordinary motions, that the distinction is perceptible, it certainly ought to be apparent not only in the inferior but also in the superior mental powers ; that is, in the understanding, the reason, and the will. But we presume that no one will pretend to such a distinguish-

ing experience in these: no one will undertake to say that any idea is become clearer to him by any other than the ordinary methods of study and observation. He will have discovered no chain of reasonings, no conclusions, to which these methods might not have been able to have conducted him.

True it is, that in meditating upon some passage of Scripture, or some point of Christian doctrine, we may often, and sometimes unexpectedly, find more light, and sooner arrive at knowledge than at other times by a course of laborious and attentive study: but there is the same experience in human science; as we may learn from philosophers and mathematicians. The proof of a proposition, or the solution of a problem, has often been sought with most painful and persevering thought; but it has at those times been sought in vain. At another

time it suggests itself at once, almost without exertion, and with perfect clearness. Here, however, nothing supernatural is to be inferred, distinct from the general appointment of the Creator. If we may venture to say any thing about the cause, we can only refer it to some difference existing at that moment in the state of mind of the individual, as well as in the impression of external objects; by means of which the process of thought is rendered more easy and more rapid than it was before. It follows, that to infer an especial divine influence from a sudden and strongly marked illumination, is to prove too much or nothing at all.

Our sentiments on this subject are by no means inconsistent with the Apostle's prayer, that "God would fill the Colossians with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding⁹."

⁹ Coloss. i. 9.

If we are to pray for corporeal benefits, which yet indisputably flow from those dispositions and appointments which God has established universally in nature, there can be no reason why we are not to pray also for awakening, for excitement, for the increase and confirmation of wholesome religious knowledge, although they are derived to us by the ordinary means of instruction, of study, and of meditation. Yet all these are entirely in the hands of God. This knowledge is imparted or facilitated to us by the ordinances and appointments of the Deity, which he can, and does establish in such great variety: and it would be impious in any man to imagine himself exempt from the duty as well of prayer as of gratitude for the good effects. Salutary views of the important concerns of faith and of the salvation of the soul, are actually the gifts of God; and it is

highly reasonable and necessary to pray for them as such : but it is not therefore necessary to believe, that the light imparted in consequence is received in a manner discernibly deviating from the ordinary course of nature. The good man will always feel his entire dependence on his Maker for all accessions to his religious knowledge ; and will never fail to own as God's work every means of making him wiser unto salvation, for which he will never cease to pray. But he will not therefore think himself bound to distinguish these means from what is effected by the natural powers of the mind.

If no supernatural influences are discernible in the higher faculties of the soul, still less are they to be expected in its inferior powers. The distinction might be facilitated in the understanding by means of the clearness of its con-

ceptions : but there is too much confusion in the gross emotions of the mind, derived from sense, to admit of such an effect. If a train of new ideas should arise in the understanding with unusual light, raising it above every view which was in its reach before ; these might claim a divine origin with far more reason than the visionary flights of vehement experiences. When, therefore, any thing singularly warm and powerful takes place in our mental feelings, which we for that reason think beyond nature, there will be good reason for concluding, not that they have not been felt, but that their origin is mistaken ; and that they are to be referred, like others, to the general laws of change in the human mind.

We add, that feelings are not stated in any part of Scripture to be the criterion of our spiritual condition. Yet this might well be expected if they were

decisive. Terror and joy would be held forth as the true test of repentance : but this is by no means the case ; and other very different marks are fixed by the authority of Holy Writ to guide our judgment, as will be hereafter shewn.

But the operations of divine grace cannot be affirmed to be distinguished as supernatural by the feeling, because they are positively declared to be effected mediately by the word. The word of God consists in those Scripture truths which concern the salvation of the soul, those just statements of the relations that subsist between God and man, which are imparted to us in the doctrines of the Gospel. These are the means by which the Almighty works all spiritual good in the soul of man, and to these we are commanded to adhere. “ Faith cometh by hearing,” by

¹ Rom. x. 17.

instruction, “and hearing by the word of God.” The term “by” limits the production of faith to the truths revealed, to the knowledge received, as the sole and constant means which the Deity employs for this salutary purpose. “Being born again^s,” changed, turned to God and Christ, “by the living word of God, which is preached among you.” “God hath begotten us^t,” hath made us new men “with the word of truth.” There cannot be more decisive testimonies, that the word or divine truths, clearly understood and duly acknowledged and received, are the proper, efficient means of all salutary changes in the human mind. It follows, that mere feeling cannot distinguish what is natural from what is not so. When an effect takes place by an intermediate cause, it is this cause we feel, because it is nearest, and imme-

^s 1 Pet. i. 23. 25. ^t James, i. 18.

diate affects us. We are struck by some solid body, and are conscious of nothing but its impulse. A hand may have thrown a stone: but we do not feel the hand: we know it to have been so thrown only from rational conclusion, or from testimony. Whatever communicates the impulse to the body, the body is still the immediate cause that acts upon us, and our feeling is confined to that alone. The comparison applies exactly to the impressions made by the word of God: it is of these alone we possess an immediate consciousness. If the work of grace could be distinctly felt, as standing separate from our natural sensations, there would in that case be no intervening medium between the great first cause and ourselves, who feel the effect; and there would be no truth in what the Scriptures tell us of the manner of God's dealings with mankind. Nay,

the Scriptures themselves might be dispensed with ; because such experiences would be in fact a particular revelation to the individuals who felt them. In repentance we feel fear, and shame, and sorrow : which we know are derived from our being awakened by the truths contained in the word of God, which are connected with repentance ; from just notions of the divine holiness and goodness, which we have affronted and abused ; from a powerful sense of the baseness of sin, and its miserable consequences ; all which are plainly set forth in Scripture. We feel the impressions created by these truths. That the Deity, in a way which we cannot explain, strengthens these impressions, as the hand communicates force to the impulse of a body thrown, we firmly believe, because it is attested by Holy Writ : but this belief is very different from the actual feeling of the

thing itself. Emotions may indeed take place, when we cannot particularize the accessions of knowledge, and the ideas by which they were produced : but these really exist, otherwise there would be no emotion : it is the confusion and obscurity which covers them in the mind that renders it impossible to bring them into light, and to state them clearly. Meanwhile, this indistinctness must always render it uncertain, whether there may not have crept in a mixture of gross erroneous notions, which may indeed make a strong impression on the feelings, but are of no real, beneficial value, because it is not known whether they are in truth the genuine teachings of the gospel.

We take this to be a strong argument, why feelings, which cannot be traced to real knowledge, are in themselves, without reference to their tendency, of

no great importance : those alone are of superior value which give us a right to say, We experience these feelings because we have clearly understood, and have duly meditated upon a certain doctrine in the word of God. Yet this distinction and superiority must suppose the case of one and the same individual. In that individual, of two distinct religious feelings of equal intensity, and with equal power leading the heart to God, that will always possess the greatest value which arises from a consciousness of clear religious knowledge, in comparison with another which rests solely upon indistinct notions. Still, however, in the case of persons of more feeble intellect, whose limited powers cannot attain to clearness in religious knowledge, it is perfectly compatible with divine wisdom and goodness, to conduct them as certainly and as safely to the

salvation of their souls, by notions and sensations of a nature more allied to sense, provided they are united with sincerity of heart, and with undoubted amendment in the affections and the life. Good feelings will in such instances compensate for deficiency in knowledge, and by God's blessing the result will be the same : the simple Christian will be guided in the way of life with as much assurance as the most knowing and enlightened. But however indistinct the views and notions may be, which give rise to feelings that in simple and uninstructed persons so beneficially answer the same purpose as higher degrees of knowledge, still, in fact, the proper source of all these salutary emotions is the truth contained in them ; although there be no consciousness nor clear perception of that truth : and it is always incontestable, that the word of God and the con-

victions thence derived, be they more or less distinct, are the sole and constant means by which all genuine religious feelings are produced.

But we are told of a previous improvement in the powers of the mind, which must take place before the word can operate with good effect. Human nature, it is said, is become, in consequence of the fall, utterly incapable of true spiritual knowledge ; and a supernatural influence must first prepare that nature, in order that the word of God may be efficacious. But this is a gratuitous assumption, not warranted by Scripture : and it amounts to no less than presumptuously dictating to the Deity the method which he is to pursue for man's restoration. Scripture tells us, that this is to be effected by the word, by the sincere admission of divine truths and convictions. It is therefore unwarrantable to maintain, that a distinct

power of receiving the word of God must be previously imparted by means of a supernatural operation, independent of, and antecedent to that word. In this assumption, the soul is compared to a diseased eye, and the truths of God's word to light: but light, it is said, will be useless to the eye when so diseased; it must be cured, before objects can be visible in their proper form. But does the patient feel, we do not say the oculist's hand, but the invisible healing power which prepares the eye for vision? And in the parallel case, can we feel the improvement in the soul, which makes us capable in future of benefiting by religious knowledge from the word? Do we feel, in the very act of its being imparted, this new creation in our mental powers? Or are we utterly unconscious of the process of this mental change? If the latter be conceded, the inquiry is at

an end, because we are speaking solely of what admits of being felt. But if we can be conscious at the moment of the invisible process, by which the spiritual eye is in the act of being healed, in order to be capable of receiving the light of truth from the word of God ; then there exists a sensation in the mind without an intermediate agent, and it is, consequently, supernatural ; and it is not by the word that the human mind is changed, but by a previous process, which is in plain contradiction to the language of Scripture adduced above, “ Ye are born again by the living word, which is preached among you ;”—“ God hath begotten us with the word of truth.”

We may, on the authority of Scripture, very safely deny the existence of supernatural influences without an intermediate agent ; and yet we may maintain the great corruption of human nature,

and the necessity of its amendment. In the case of the diseased eye we may be allowed, for mere argument, to assume, that the rays of light are of so refined a quality, and of a power so penetrating, as to disperse the noxious humours in the eye without external assistance. The patient then feels nothing but the light ; and the feeling may at first be very painful, but he is recompensed at last by the power of looking round him with restored and perfect vision. Such a healing light is the word of God, the truths and doctrines, the motives and persuasions of the Gospel. These work repentance, faith, amendment, hope, confidence, and joy. In all these happy changes, we are not made immediately or supernaturally conscious of any other power by which they are effected, than the power of that truth, that salutary knowledge, which the grace of God has

rendered capable of accomplishing so great a work. It is of these means, and of these results alone, that we are conscious. The more intelligibly our feelings can be deduced from them, and explained by them, the more secure shall we be from noxious errors and self-deception. All mysterious and fanciful notions on this subject must give way to the clear and decisive testimonies of Holy Writ, and to the essential constitution of the human mind. While Scripture teaches us that God worketh in us by his word, which is always accompanied by his grace, we want no other, above all, no incomprehensible source of feeling.

We have already said, that we believe a special influence of the Holy Spirit to operate in man's return to God, strengthening the power of the word of truth in producing conviction. The certainty of that influence is best ascertained by the

tendency of the feelings which are then created. We say, expressly, the tendency of the feelings ; not the full result in the renovation of the man. For the word of truth may sometimes awaken the conscience of the most hardened sinner for a while ; but the feeling is suppressed, and becomes ineffectual. Yet the influence which produced it may, nevertheless, have come from God : the tendency itself is a moral proof that from God it came, though, unhappily, it only served to enhance the man's guilt who heard the call ; heard it, perhaps, often, but never had obeyed it.

God wills man to be virtuous and holy, and thereby happy. All thoughts, feelings, and affections which tend to make him so, to withdraw him from sin, and to bring him to God, are, beyond all doubt, to be ascribed to the divine influence. Every compunction for sin and

excitement to the hatred of it; every impulse to the love of God, to trust in him, to obedience to his will, arising from the contemplation of his mercy in our redemption by Jesus Christ; every feeling of increased pleasure in what is right and good; all these are evidences of the operation of divine grace, because all spiritual good originates in God; and this evidence is not at all weakened by the fact, that this influence has been imperceptible, and, according to all appearance, natural.

That the tendency, not the mere feeling, is the true criterion of divine influence, is expressly asserted by divines of great piety and learning. We will not, indeed, maintain, with the ingenious Jortin^u, that no man can be a Christian in sincerity, who pretends to ascertain, by the mere feeling, the distinction be-

^u Six Dissertations. Diss. i. p. 22. Lond. 1755.

tween the work of nature and the work of grace. We trust, that among the advocates of a different opinion from our own, there are very good men and sincere Christians. But we have also those on our side, who to their goodness and sincerity add so much judgment, as, in our opinion, gives them a superior claim to our attention.

Dr. John Evans, author of “ Practical Sermons on the Christian Temper^x,” will not be suspected of conceding too much to nature : he has, however, the following passage : “ Nor are we to apprehend his influence to be perceivable by itself, but we know it to be from him purely by revelation. We believe his agency in all the good we find in ourselves, because the Scripture ascribes it to him. He works upon us in and by the natural actings of our own minds, and usually in

^x Practical Discourses, &c. vol. 1. p. 270.

a very familiar way ; so that we should not be able to distinguish his agency from our own, if we were not assured by revelation from whom every good notion has its rise ; that “every good and perfect gift comes from above ;” and all good things in the sphere of grace by the Spirit. His acting is in a way so con-natural to the actings of our own faculties, that we should not be able merely by feeling to distinguish from whence it came, or, that it had any other rise than from our own spirits, if the Scripture did not point us to the Spirit of grace as the fountain of it. This seems to be Christ’s meaning, when he represents to Nicodemus the operations of the Spirit by an allusion to the wind : ‘the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth ; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.’ He

acts really and powerfully upon the minds of men, and they are conscious of the good motion, but could not of themselves know the origin of it."

Dr. Doddridge^y is very well known to have possessed a spirit animated with the liveliest feelings of religion. He will tell us what he thinks of the distinctions made between nature and grace, which are pretended to take place by means of immediate consciousness. "There may be an operation of the Holy Spirit upon a person's mind, by which he is better instructed and more stedfastly confirmed in the truths of God's word; and yet it has the appearance as if all took place by means of the person's own natural powers, which the Deity employs in his operations. Consequently, a divine truth which has been comprehended by study and meditation, is not to be considered

^y Theological Letters, p. 275.

as an immediate revelation, and an extraordinary work of God. It is to be looked upon as a truth founded in Scripture, for the understanding of which the mind has been made capable by the guidance of divine grace. I am entirely of opinion that this imperceptible method of divine influence upon our minds is far more suitable to the wisdom and goodness of that adorable Being from whom it is derived ; that it is more compatible with our state of trial, to lead us to eternal happiness by faith, rather than by sight. When, therefore, the mind receives a strong impression from any divine truths, and we find ourselves excited to meditate diligently upon them, to search the Scriptures, not from curiosity, but with a sincere desire to become partakers of the grace of God ; when the word of God creates good feelings and resolutions within us, and we find ourselves inwardly animated and strength-

ened to resist temptation, and to fulfil our duties with patience and fidelity amidst every hinderance; I am farther of opinion, and I am supported in it by the authority of Scripture, that we are not to ascribe this merely to the kindness of providence in having made us reasonable creatures, and having placed us in such favourable circumstances as to have come to the knowledge of divine revelation contained in the Scriptures ; but that such an effect belongs to the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit on our hearts, in conjunction with the favourable circumstances before mentioned. The inquiry is therefore unimportant, ‘where nature ends, and where grace begins ;’ or what is the precise distinction between this twofold instruction, since their operation is intimately blended. Suppose a master should place two candles in a certain position, by the light of which his men are to do their work : if

instead of working they waste their time in examining how far the light of each candle extends, and in fixing the exact line of separation, the master would certainly not thank them for their pains, but much rather punish them for their idleness. I have been often grieved to see volumes written upon questions which cannot, or need not be accurately determined."

We will subjoin the sentiments of Von Aken.^z " Since the Holy Spirit operates in union with the truths of Scripture and our natural faculties, we are not to wonder that this is done so imperceptibly, and so much in harmony with our good thoughts and resolutions, that, were we not assured that of ourselves we can do no good, we might suppose the whole to be effected by our own powers. The illuminations by the word may therefore be real, though they are not accompanied

^z Reden zur Erbauung, 1 Th. 255. S.

with vehemence nor extraordinary light. The power of conscience awakened by instruction is the work of the Spirit. When our knowledge harmonizes with the divine attributes and with the word of God, we may justly ascribe to the Holy Spirit the feelings awakened in our conscience, and every inward compunction arising from our conduct. The whole has indeed the appearance of natural effect ; but it is still to be imputed to a superior influence." These authorities prove at least that there is nothing uncommon in the opinion which we advocate.

If the influence of grace is not to be distinguished by the feeling from the natural changes in our minds, nor by our immediate consciousness, it follows, that we are by no means anxiously to watch the sudden formation, or vehement character of our religious feelings, as if

this were the main point ; since the whole may here be entirely similar to our natural mental changes ; nay, may be identically the same. Our attention must be given exclusively to the tendency of such feelings ; whether it is in perfect unison with the doctrines of the Gospel. We are not to remark, “ How extraordinary, how much beyond nature is our present state of mind : ” but we are to ask ourselves, “ Whither is this emotion leading us ? What amendment is it going to effect in our mind and conduct ? How will it be with us if we follow its impulse ? ” It is this alone which can furnish a sure criterion, whether or not we have experienced the salutary influence of divine grace. All God’s appointments for our spiritual welfare will only then attain their end, when we solicitously apply them to our own condition ; when the truth, made

effectual by grace, strikes home upon the conscience. Our knowledge of God, of his designs with respect to us, of the duties which we owe to him, of the means which he has generally appointed for our welfare,—all these may be just and true, and regularly derived by a chain of reasoning from a due acquaintance with the sense and purport of the divine testimonies ;—yet, if the whole have still no manner of concern with the conscience, and do not powerfully set before us our guilt or innocence, our happiness or misery,—it will not bring us one step nearer to our great and final destination. Not so when our knowledge bears closely upon our own spiritual condition, and impels us to live and act in unison with what we know. It is precisely the same with our mental feelings. These may in a distant manner, and yet with enough of vehemence, be occupied with religious

objects : they may, however, do no spiritual service to the individual, because they have no reference to himself, to his personal relation to his Maker, to his own good or evil spiritual condition. The best knowledge and the warmest feelings must come home to the individual's self, before he can come under the true guidance of the Spirit. This therefore is the main point, and alone decisive in the question of divine influences, if the object of man's restoration is expected to be attained. All besides of light in the understanding, and of emotion in the mind, is only a distant preparation for our communion with God. The value of knowledge as well as of feelings is exhibited in its real, most estimable, and most beneficial worth, in that we apply them to ourselves especially, that we make them our own business, and that we are brought by them into such a frame of mind and affections, as

will render us pleasing in the sight of God, and happy in ourselves.

In no other way than this do we derive any benefit to our souls from the word of God and the doctrines of Christianity. Before they are thus applied, all knowledge acquired, and all emotion excited by reading the holy Scriptures are as little spiritual in their nature, are as little conducive to the fulfilling of the divine intentions with regard to us, as our acquaintance with a truth in mathematics, or as our lively admiration of the beauty of a flower, when it extends no farther, and leads us not to the contemplation of the great Creator, nor to the relation in which we stand to him. The death and sufferings of Christ for man's redemption are the main doctrine and pillar of Christianity. Now, let the utmost emotion be excited in the reader or the hearer of this most remarkable event, so deeply in-

teresting in all its melancholy circumstances ; let the mind be overwhelmed with wonder and with sympathy ; let the eyes overflow with tears,—tears which are thought by some to be highly precious and meritorious ; still the whole may be nothing more than the common feelings of human nature. If the event be not brought home to the conscience, as most nearly concerning the individual himself ; if all these emotions are nothing more than would be felt from the story of any other person in similar circumstances, and in whom he had no concern ; if his mind is not powerfully occupied by the thought, that this suffering and dying Christ is *his* Saviour, the sacrifice for *his* sins, the restorer of *his* forfeited salvation ; in that case, all this mental agitation, all these sympathetic tears, possess not any greater value, contribute no more to his spiritual welfare, than if it were the fate

of a Regulus or a Polycarp that made this impression on his feelings. It is only when these reflections influence the mind, and make the person think upon himself, and in consequence lead him to abhor his guilt even in its distant view ; when he is brought to take Christ the sacrifice for sin as *his own* deliverer, and is attracted to him with love and gratitude ; it is only then he can say with truth, that he feels the influence of divine grace, because it conducts him directly to the very object which it is the will of God he should pursue.

This confirms the remark already made, that in religion the main point by no means depends upon an exact and anxious watch and notice of what is extraordinary in our feelings ; but that our proper attention and concern must be directed solely to the general and unremitting tendency of these feelings to bring us unto

God, and that we apply them sincerely to this purpose. All besides this in religious feeling is fluctuating and uncertain, and depends upon the natural state of the mind and body. In the whole business of divine influence, as far as it concerns our future welfare, the great end is this, that salutary truths be made effectual by their direct application to our own hearts. This influence, then, resembles light, the whole purpose and effect of which are exhibited in making objects visible: but it may be greatly diversified in its operation, by the various qualities of the medium through which it passes. If light is transmitted through cut or coloured glass, the persons who are to make use of it, if they are wise, do not waste their time in looking at the playful effect produced by its tints; do not give themselves up to paroxysms of rapture at its varied beauty; nor do they keep a jour-

nal of its changes : but they use the light for its proper purpose, to see by it in doing their work, and are indifferent to the refraction of its rays, if it be strong and clear enough for their use. So, in the work of grace, and all its diversified operations, however numerous and manifold its impressions may be, the grand object must at all times be this, that we allow our frame of mind and affections to remain stedfast under the guidance of this divine light, so as to be rendered by it unfeignedly good men ; and so to be brought into communion with God. Anxious attention to all the peculiarities of such feelings, to all their various occasions, circumstances, and gradations ; useless solicitude to keep an exact account of what may have been thus felt,—these can by no means conduct us to the important end of our creation and existence, but will probably act as an impediment thereto. Our

spiritual safety will depend upon the degree of uniform steadiness and unmixed simplicity with which we endeavour to keep this object in our view, without suffering our attention to be drawn aside from this one thing needful by any thing else, of whatever pious appearance and devout pretension, which may distract it. God's purpose with regard to man is plain and simple,—the re-establishment of order in the soul laid waste by sin : for thus the obstacle to divine mercy is removed ; the communication of the fruits of Christ's redemption is made possible ; and man's real and entire happiness is restored. It will be well for him, if he notices unceasingly this tendency of the Spirit which is at work in him, and yields to its influence, whatever change and diversity, and how great soever, may be found in his experiences. God wills us to be good ; and our being so depends upon ourselves,

upon our resistance, or our compliance. How he carries on his work in us, is a question which by no means claims our attention so much as how we carry on our own: and this consists in labouring in our conscience not to resist the truth. God's work is sure to go on without any inquiry, and nice and anxious observation on our part. But to turn our eyes in upon ourselves; never to close them against the light that shines within us; and so to resolve to be what God will have us be, and is ready to make us; this is the proper business of our attention and solicitude.

We shall thus cut off at once every fancy of peculiar divine impressions, which have no relation to the proper object of the influences of grace. It is hard to understand what persons mean, when in their temporal concerns they earnestly pray to God to direct them what to choose,

and what to reject. We wish such prayers, with all their shew of devotion, were not too often profaned by the utter insignificance of their object. In important cases, prayer for divine guidance may be useful; first, when we beg of God such a disposition of outward circumstances as may enable us to distinguish the better and more useful measure from the worse and more prejudicial; secondly, when, by the very act of prayer and the direction of the mind to God, our attention may be more awake to those circumstances which, from reason and conscience, ought to determine our resolution: for it is these, and only these, which must explain and justify our conduct in every worldly measure and concern. Whatever other impulse makes us more inclined to one resolution than to another, without any ground of prudence from reason, or of right from

conscience ; that impulse rests merely upon our present humour, and cannot be ascribed to any guidance from above. Such guidance would be an influence plainly deviating from the laws of human thought, and would undeniably amount to a miracle, which is no where promised. It would therefore be absolutely tempting the Deity to pray to him in such a sense, to be directed what to do and what to leave undone. The feelings created in us by the Holy Spirit may, as we have observed repeatedly, be ascertained from the ground on which they rest, namely, right views and convictions drawn from the word of God, when these are clear, and we are sure that we entertain them : or if the matter must rest upon mere sensation, they are to be judged of by their tendency to produce our inward amendment, and to bring us into communion with God. But both these signs are

wanting in those fancied especial impulses, which are sometimes expected after prayer, as if they were sent from heaven, to determine our choice in temporal undertakings, when it is impossible to justify that choice on grounds either of duty or of prudence. However sudden and powerful such impulses may be, still if they cannot be explained upon principles of knowledge and sound judgment, it is not to be imagined that the Deity is directing our conduct by their means: they are much rather to be considered as created by some previous disposition, naturally existing in our minds on that occasion, of which we may be entirely unconscious. A single instance of unfortunate result proves the fallacy of such persuasions: for to impute the failure not to the real cause, our own imprudence or dishonesty, but to the inscrutable ways of providence, is no other than a most

impious reflection on God's most holy government. Equally impious is the practice of placing to the account of divine suggestion resolutions which, though successful in the event, are most unwarrantable in their nature, and most wicked and pernicious in their execution. The times of Cromwell furnish us with dreadful instances of such impiety, which ought to serve as warnings to all succeeding ages. If a strong and sudden impulse is to pass for an inspired suggestion ; and if we are justified in praying for, and in consequence expecting such suggestions in our temporal concerns ; the miraculous acts of the Deity will thus be multiplied without promise, and without necessity. Simple modes of action are most consonant to the nature of the greatest and the wisest of all beings, whom we much too frequently dishonour by attributing to him the littleness of human actions. It is no answer to

say, that the wisdom of God often appears folly unto man. If a divine revelation, duly proved and rightly understood, ascribes expressly to the Deity something that should appear to us degrading to his attributes ; we should in that case feel that we did not survey the matter in its whole extent ; that we too easily suffered an illusion upon our judgment ; and that there might in fact be something not unworthy of him, which might however appear so to us. But when revelation furnishes not the smallest lessons and assurances of this kind ; and we have not the least ground for such mere human notions with regard to the Supreme Being ; we have no right to make our ways of thinking and of acting a rule for him ; and thus to forget what we owe to his infinite perfections. Many persons of contracted views entertain very mean conceptions of the Deity, and

find these most affecting to their feelings : they are never so much edified, as when they think of him entirely as of a man, with all those feelings, passions, and affections which they know are actually existing in themselves. But the rational mind will always think far more worthily and congruously of God ; and will feel that even in this sense, " his thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways." In every impulse that tends to God, to truth and order, and to goodness, the rational mind will rejoice in being under the immediate and actual influence of divine grace : but will not, however, pretend, in every instance, to a peculiar operation of the Deity, in any insulated feeling which may bring it into an unusual state. By the former persuasion the mind is purified and exalted ; by the latter it is disordered and debased.

It requires more discernment than we,

for our part, possess, to prove that the opposition very commonly maintained to exist between nature and grace is not greatly exaggerated, and does not lead to much abuse and harm. Since the Deity indisputably works by natural means, as far as nature consists in that primary constitution of things which was established by himself; since the essential powers and relations of created beings tend as directly to the final object of general perfection and happiness, and as certainly contribute their part thereto as what is properly termed grace ; we do not see what can be gained by fixing the limits between both with such solicitous exactness ; and what especial purpose it is to answer, that all which men think right to thrust down into the province of mere nature should be so contemptuously undervalued and degraded. Their origin is the same : their

final object is the same: both are so intimately blended together, that it is not easy to point out where the one ceases and the other begins. We may well rest satisfied with the truth, that it is God who is conducting us by all these means to happiness; that whatsoever has this tendency claims our reverence, our attention, and our most careful application; whilst we entirely renounce any distinctions and separations which serve only to generate confusion. Or, if we grant the existence of a nature, worthless and deserving our contempt, which must be placed in opposition to grace, we are to confine it to the depravations and corruptions of our original constitution, to our unbridled passions, to the extravagancies of sense and fancy; and particularly to the workings of physical mechanism and temperament in man, which, in themselves, and as far as they are in-

dependent of the higher principles of consideration and premeditated purpose, can confer no moral value on our actions. But to the knowledge of truth, to reason, to conscience, the principles which God has implanted in us, and which truly and properly constitute our nature,—to these let such justice be at all times done, that no act of ours which really flows from them, and is in unison with the final purpose of man's existence, be ever held in contempt, or be undervalued by being completely separated from what is connected with the whole of his spiritual welfare. If men would hold these sacred principles in greater reverence, and become more and more sensible of their bounden duty to be guided by them, they would then feel convinced how powerfully God is at work in them by these very means to lead them to perfection. What should prevent us from believing,

that where there is truth, practical, active truth, tending directly to amend the heart, and to bring it into order, there grace likewise has its influence? The following words of Semler are extremely apposite: “The knowledge of God derived from nature must not be depreciated: it is the first step to that which is revealed; and by the influence of its truths God has brought even heathens to a salutary acquaintance with himself. The importance of the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, in this point of view, seems to be too much overlooked. It is however so undoubted and so great, that from it the ancient church taught, that, with the truths derived from nature, the Deity united influences correspondent to what we now call grace.” D. Hauber^b likewise scruples not to ascribe

^a Einleitung in die Dogmatische Gottesgelehrsamkeit, 54. S.

^b Biblische Betrachtungen, 876. S.

those effects to nature which are usually given to grace : “ God’s revealed word is certainly not preached in every part of the world. Yet it would be a great mistake to imagine, that the Spirit of God has no influence except in Christian countries. The Spirit of God does indeed operate by the word of God : but it operates on the conscience even in man’s natural state without the word, before it is preached ; and in so powerful a manner as to leave no excuse. The Deity means not only to bring those to whom his word is preached to faith in Christ ; but also to awaken to repentance and amendment those to whom it is not yet preached. Both are effected by the power of the Spirit of God, which exerts the very same influence in making the heathen good and virtuous, as in making him a Christian.” Thus closely are grace and nature interwoven :

thus indisputably can man's natural powers, and faculties, and knowledge be made instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit, to bring his mind into its due direction to his Maker, independently of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. This undoubted truth forbids all distinctive separation between grace and nature, such as we have defined it, namely, the inborn qualities first given by God, and by him directed to promote our spiritual welfare, when their due exercise and application are not defeated by our own fault. We are therefore at a loss to discover what service to religion those persons do, who exert unbounded zeal in crying down all practical, rational meditations upon the attributes and works of God, upon our relation to him, upon our duties and our expectations ; as if this tended to the utter subversion of religion, and were the certain hinderance of God's great purpose

with regard to man. They thus presumptuously tear asunder what the wisdom of God has joined so closely together: they inconsiderately and unwarrantably deprecate knowledge and feelings which are built on truth, and which lead to the final object of all the divine teachings and appointments. If men will persist in distinguishing grace from nature, it must be by some other criterion than the virtuous impulses of the human mind in which they are both united. Yet there may be insulated acts of entire resemblance outwardly, while they are utterly distinct in principle: the one shall spring from false views, from vanity and self-interest, from natural temper, or from mechanical habit: the other shall proceed from a just feeling of right and truth, from conscientious motive, from the love of God, from obedience to his will, and from grounds of natural religion and morals: in the former kind

of actions there does not exist the smallest virtue or moral worth, but certainly the very contrary. But this absence of worth and virtue is not occasioned by such actions flowing from the essential principles and feelings of the human mind, but because they originate in the corruption of those principles, and in our deviation from them; and they then deserve our reprobation and contempt, notwithstanding their virtuous semblance. But that reprobation must never be extended to similar acts which are derived from genuine, though natural, knowledge and from right convictions, under the pretence that they are the work of nature, not of grace. Perhaps this rigid depreciation and rejection of the good that comes from nature, may be owing principally to its being considered as the work of man alone, and all such influences are placed expressly to his account. It is feared that human pride

would be too much indulged, if what is only the result of the mere impulses of our nature should be thought capable of pleasing God, and could have any influence upon our spiritual welfare: it is therefore thought better to depreciate and despise whatever is ascribed to nature, in order to deprive man of all which he might arrogate as his own, of which he might make a merit, and by which he might exalt himself in the sight of God. This is thought to be the only way to bring him back to his real insignificance. The design is laudable, but the means employed are as unnecessary as they are unwarrantable. More attention to the tone and spirit of Holy Writ, which are so true in themselves, and so perfectly accordant with the nature of the thing in question, would discover to us more of God in all the good that exists in man and that is done by him ; and we should

recognize it as the unremitting operation of the Deity. It is the pre-eminent excellence of revelation that it refers all to God, and declares him to be the sole original cause of all existence which is not intrinsically defective and corrupt. In our most natural qualities, powers, and capacities, it is evident that nothing is our own. We are as little the authors of those arrangements, circumstances, and opportunities, by means of which they are rightly exhibited and applied. Both are as completely out of the command and appropriation of a human being, as any thing that comes under the name of grace in the more strict and usual meaning of the word ; and neither of them therefore furnishes the smallest ground for self-exaltation. Man ought to be told this truth positively and repeatedly ; and it will then be unnecessary to humble his pride by undervaluing the actual good

which is derived from his reason and his moral nature. We contribute much more to that pride, when we tell him that his natural goodness belongs to himself alone: he will rejoice to find that so it is, and will feel quite satisfied with that reflection. That this natural goodness is not bad, he knows too well to be persuaded of the contrary by all the ingenious or metaphysical subtleties of ancient or of modern St. Augustines. The result will of course be self-idolatry, the proper heresy of Pelagius in all its horror. The surest way to prevent this miserable perversion would be, to teach every man to consider even his natural powers and qualities as by no means of his own creation ; but always to bear in mind the Apostle's words, "what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it ?" Here, man has no re-

source for pride: he sees that he has nothing of his own; that he can do nothing of himself; but that the honour belongs to God alone.

We cannot with reason be accused of raising new altars to the idol of nature by our observations, and of detracting from the pre-eminence of grace. When all is declared to be grace, there ought to be no fear of its disparagement. We may be wrong; we may not be able to discover those distinctions which seem obvious to other men; but we are perfectly convinced that the necessary and main result is on both sides the same. However interwoven and inseparable the influences of nature and of grace may be, always meaning by nature the remnant of great and essential principles and faculties in man; however highly we may value the improvements effected in us by all the powerful convictions of truth; still the

frame of mind and qualities of heart which thence arise are at all times the same, alike desirable in themselves, and alike pleasing unto God. All good is from him: all that actually amends us, and conduces to our real welfare, we ascribe to him with the most sincere and unreserved conviction. We feel our entire dependence upon him in all: and it would be madness to be strangers to humility under that feeling. But whether this goodness is produced in us more or less immediately is properly no concern of ours. For us it is enough to know, unto whom we owe the smallest virtuous feature in our moral character, the most minute endeavour after purity and perfection.

We think we have now placed it beyond dispute, that there are only two ways by which our religious feelings can be warranted in us as good, as desirable,

and divinely influenced ; first, when they are clearly known to be derived from the word of God, or from the genuine convictions of divine truth : and, secondly, by their active tendency to real sanctification, and to the sincere direction of our minds to God. This latter criterion in particular is the only one by which we can judge of and appreciate feelings, when they do not admit of being explained by, and traced to those Scriptural notions and convictions upon which however they are built. We conclude, that the influence of grace is not distinguishable by immediate feeling, by its peculiar vehemence or its sudden production, from the variations which naturally arise in the human mind.



SECOND PART.

WE come now to the second question, whether certain powerful feelings are necessary in repentance and religion ; at least, for our conviction that we have repented, and how far they are so. Here again we see no other way to come at certainty, but by first considering the nature of the thing itself, and secondly by adhering to the testimonies of Holy Writ, where they are clear and distinct. Whatever sound experience and its conclusions teach us of the general and essential constitution of human nature, both in itself and in the changes and improvements which religion

tells us ought to be effected in it, must also be a good and sure ground of judgment in this inquiry; and will decide the question with far more certainty than individual feelings, which are so commonly made a general rule; and by which men so often take upon them to interpret scripture.

It must be first determined what God requires on the part of man, of sinful man especially; and what he designs to make him, for all has reference to this; and farther, what must take place in man for the attainment of this end. If our thoughts upon the subject are indistinct, indefinite, and confused, our judgments will too easily fluctuate; and we shall fall into various minute deviations, flattering, perhaps, to our peculiar turn of mind and inclinations, but actually leading us astray from the direct and royal road. Without all doubt the main pur-

pose of man's existence is to please God and to be happy in himself by inward order, by purity and innocence of mind. No being can be pleasing to the infinite pattern of all goodness, but in as far as he is what he ought to be, in conformity with his Maker's purpose in his creation. This divine complacency is a sure and principal source of happiness to every thinking moral being; but it is by no means the only source. Inward order and rectitude must in their very nature create agreeable sensations, as certainly as full bodily health imparts cheerfulness to the animal spirits. This immediate influence of goodness upon happiness, even taken separately from the thought of the divine approbation, and of our dependence upon God, cannot be denied without the entire subversion of human nature. But when the man is pleasing to his Maker, because he is what he was

designed to be, his happiness is then entirely complete. Thus it stands with man in innocence and uncorrupted.

But with man, when he is become an actual sinner, both are lost, and he is therefore miserable in more ways than one. Due order and harmony of mind and affections have disappeared, and estrangement from God has brought disorder and misery united into the human soul. Inward economy is banished, and with it peace of mind. Sense overpowers conscience and reason, which ought to rule ; and this state of mutiny and disorder must cause a still increasing and endless progress in imperfection and wretchedness. Such is human nature when depraved by actual transgression. It is already ruined by sin, without any reference to God. But when the thought of God is superadded ; when fallen man thinks of his relation to his Maker ; he

must find his condition inconceivably more dreadful. He has, as far as in him lay, laboured directly to oppose the designs of the most gracious Parent of all created beings; designs, the constant tendency of which is to establish order, joy, and happiness throughout creation: and particularly, he has done his utmost to contravene and subvert them in what regards himself: a most awful reflection this, when it is duly felt. But he has besides compelled the supreme and most righteous Ruler of the universe, not only to employ severe and painful measures to repair the ruin and to heal depravity; but also, in accordance with the unalterable laws of right and justice, to cause man himself to feel what is his just portion as an offending sinner; thereby, at the same time, to stem the farther inroad of transgression to the prejudice of general happiness and order. Cer-

tain it is, that the bare idea of being exposed to the punishment of a most Holy Being, who watches over the general welfare of his creatures, ought to be above measure dreadful and appalling to the human mind: yet it would be impious to imagine any personal bitterness, any of the angry passions of human nature to influence the conduct of the Most High. He is only to be thought of as the Supreme Ruler, who maintains order in the universe, and diffuses mercy and blessing wheresoever that order remains unviolated, or has been re-established. This therefore must be the rule by which we ought to judge of human feelings, in reference to repentance and religion; whether they are built upon the real truth of man's spiritual condition, as we have stated it above, or are mere creations of the fancy, and arise from mere accessory notions, that rest upon no foundation.

But to allay the sinner's fears, who must otherwise have cause to expect the most melancholy consequences of his transgression, the gospel consolation immediately presents itself; assuring him that all these consequences are removed by the mediation and atonement of the Son of God ; that the guilt incurred, if not repeated and persisted in, will not exclude him from God's unlimited mercy. The gospel has made it possible for the sinner to be pardoned, if he will not perversely labour to be his own destruction : he may be saved from that misery to which he must otherwise be liable under God's most holy government, according to the eternal laws of right and order.

These convictions, first taught by Christianity alone, and by it explained, supported, and enforced, determine the feelings which are requisite in the great business of our moral change and return

to God; and are the only rule by which we are to judge with certainty of the necessity and importance of those feelings, let their degree be what it may. The real value of such impressions will depend upon their being clearly and rationally deduced from a sense of our own individual guilt, and of God's merciful forgiveness in Christ. Every emotion, not so derived, is merely accidental, and claims no attention, except in as far as it can contribute any thing to the great purpose of actual amendment and well-grounded consolation.

Scripture is clear upon this subject, when it is properly understood and explained without prejudice. Where it expressly teaches the nature of repentance and our return to God, it always insists upon change of heart and conduct, accompanied with the hope of God's mercy through Christ. Many passages might

be quoted which insist on nothing more, and therefore fully prove these alone to be essential. If strong feelings *seem* here and there to be adverted to ; other places without number dwell exclusively on the hatred of sin, and the mind's right direction unto God and to actual goodness. The few passages which might at first appear to inculcate such feelings generally, will, upon closer examination, give no support to the doctrine in dispute, as will be seen in the sequel. The hope and certainty of pardon are not in Holy Writ attached to any powerful emotions ; but to such a change of heart and life as shall make him to be now a good man, who before was wicked and impenitent.

But there can be no such change, no return from sin to God without a powerful sense of personal guilt : this is indeed that wretched state which makes help and deliverance so supremely necessary.

Here, however, all must depend upon the conviction of that individual, personal guilt which the sinner finds directly in himself. It cannot be enough to form strong pictures in the fancy of the general corruption by sin ; and to feel remorse solely from being included in it generally : yet this is all that many intend and dwell upon. They believe themselves lost, accursed, condemned : they crowd every frightful thought into this reflection, in an indistinct and confused manner, and are in consequence certainly harrowed with resistless feelings of terror and anguish. But it may reasonably be doubted, on the authority of experience, whether these general feelings of human corruption, these undefined terrors and abhorrences are always brought to bear with sufficient force and earnestness upon self, upon individual transgression, in which human corruption is separately active in

the men themselves, upon those irregular propensities which rule more than others in their own hearts and infect them ; whether they dwell upon these as much as they ought to do ; whether they are at all times deeply conscious of these their own personal depravities. It costs but little to a man's self-love to say, that he is by nature as wicked as a thief or murderer : but to probe the heart to the bottom, to canvass the life minutely, and then to own the frequent instances of folly in concealed pride, and of meanness in secret envy, and many other thoughts and works of darkness ; this is by no means a business of so easy achievement for the love of self : it is a mortification seldom encountered by the most zealous declaimers on general corruption, as we are warranted in concluding from repeated examples and occurrences. Yet we do not hold public confession to be essential

to repentance. Let it be made first to the tribunal of the conscience : let the penitent, in full sincerity of heart, and as in the presence of God, render an exact account of the thoughts, the actions, and affections of his past life, and give them their proper names without reserve. If after this he thinks it will conduce to the honour of God and of religion, and to his own amendment, to open his heart to a fellow-creature ; this will be better than to waste words upon the misery of man's natural depravity, and to paint in frightful colours a condition which is common unto all. Human corruption is assuredly very great : we have the testimony of Scripture to prove it. The unbridled dominion of sense, and of the meaner selfish propensities, banishes all taste for truth and order, invests the soul with a hideous form, and creates spiritual devastation, confusion, and ruin. But to be clearly

and forcibly convinced of this we must look immediately into our own hearts, and the prevailing views and affections which we have fostered there. No real and thorough amendment can be effected there, unless it be preceded by this home view of personal depravity, and of the abhorrence which it deserves. This must be so minute as to excite our actual detestation and horror of our sins, without which they cannot be overcome ; nor be prevented from breaking into outward acts. Where this has not been done, we may indeed often observe persons very remarkably altered, but not become really better upon the whole. They will make a great parade of their conversion, to use their favourite term ; they will paint their natural corruption in the blackest colours ; and yet the whole of their change shall consist in no more than this, to consider their former taste for certain outward re-

creations as the abominable fruit of that corruption, and to condemn it in themselves and others with a correspondent vehemence of language. A change of this sort is visible and striking ; and many think it highly important, and completely decisive. But as to the invisible depravities of the heart, the more subtle workings of pride, uncharitableness, envy, party spirit, revenge, oppression, these do not always lose their influence, because cards and dancing are renounced. It is to be feared on very probable grounds, that where this change in things harmless and indifferent is conspicuous, and enjoys all the admiration which it looked for, the party may be entirely unconscious of those far more baneful evils existing in him, and still more a stranger to any thought of getting rid of them. Hence we see the necessity of knowing our own personal depravity and guilt, and in them

the unholy influence of natural corruption, and of entertaining a due sense of their enormity.

Meanwhile, as there is a difference of degree in the moral depravity of different individuals, and the conduct which results from it, there will be a correspondent difference in the accompanying feelings ; which cannot therefore be uniformly the same in every man. If we carefully observe ourselves or other people, we shall find that some, from a mere mental illusion, set a greater value than they ought to do upon earthly visible things, and yet are not immersed in vice and wicked habits properly so called ; while in others vice has the complete mastery of the soul, and the practice of it is habitual. In the latter instance, there is a more marked distinction ; and of course when the conscience is awakened the impressions will be far more acute than in the former case.

Real acts of sin committed, positive indulgence of vicious passions and propensities, will strike with more force on the repentant thought, and excite more bitter sorrow and more vehement abhorrence, than will naturally arise from a general taste for worldly vanities carried too far. The measures of alteration are more exactly and distinctly marked when habitual vices are broken off and laid aside, than when merely an earthly frame of mind gradually loses its influence, and yields to the growing prevalence of the love of God, and to the power of reason and religion. Thus are the degrees of moral depravity distinguished in different persons ; and that distinction will operate accordingly, and be visible in the feelings of the awakened penitent.

But in every case the sense of guilt, in any of its gradations, must be coupled with a heart-felt sense of shame and self-

reproach. What makes sin hateful in the sight of God ought in all reason to make it hateful unto us, and to excite our deepest sorrow and regret. The moral eye now opened must view this frightful disorder, and its certain dreadful consequences, with extreme displeasure, with contempt and detestation of the soul's past condition. The more we come to love God, who is the fountain of all order, the more shall we hold in abhorrence what he disapproves. It follows, that the regret and sorrow thus created are by no means to be undervalued as insignificant; which appears to be done by those, who derive all the anguish and sadness of an awakened conscience from the harrowing idea of God's avenging justice. It is, indeed, true, that the thought of an offended God is capable of exciting an extreme degree of terror in the mind: and it will prevail with the

greater and the grosser vehemence in the heated multitude, the more it is mixed up with the notion of an Almighty Being, arbitrary in his measures, irritable, and of vindictive passions like a man. No wonder, then, that the heart should sink under such frightful and appalling images, of which the examples are not unfrequent: for the wild and tempestuous fear of provoked Omnipotence is, beyond all doubt, the most overwhelming feeling that can agitate and depress the human mind. We do not mean to say, that this wretched mental state renders the individual reprobate in the sight of God, or excludes him from pardoning mercy, and from real amendment and consolation in the sequel. If the heart be sincere, and that sincerity be proved in the essential point of a virtuous life and conduct, the penitent will by no means be debarred his interest in Christ's atonement for any

terrifying emotions arising from a contracted way of thinking. But is such terror indispensable in every penitent? This is entirely another question. Is repentance more perfectly accomplished by such dismaying apprehensions of the vengeance of an angry God as amount nearly to despair? Will not the sadness of the penitent be far more generous, and more acceptable to the Deity, when it arises not so much from the dread of punishment, as from the thought of having deserved it? Will it not suffice to feel the misery and shame of having compelled the Almighty, who wills our happiness, to find us incapable of his pardoning mercy, and therefore to punish us according to the immutable laws of order, and of general good? If we thus lay aside the slavish fear of a personal exasperation on the part of God, of which he is incapable; if the penitent's fears

upon due reflection be resolved into dread of the consequences to be expected from his transgression of that order which the Deity maintains in his creation ; this will be found sufficiently awful, without the addition of any factitious terrors. God's wisdom, holiness, and goodness, by which the general welfare of his creatures is maintained, and all inroads upon it are stemmed and contravened without any interested views on his part ; these are, with far more reason, the objects of our fear than selfish and arbitrary resentment. An excellent author^c says, “ Goodness is the natural and just object of the greatest fear to an ill man. Malice may be appeased or satiated ; humour may change ; but goodness is a just, steady, immovable principle of action. If either of the former holds the sword

^c Bp. Butler's Sermons. Preface, p. 18. Edinburgh, 1813.

of justice, there is plainly ground for the greatest of crimes to hope for impunity : but if it be goodness, there can be no possible hope, whilst the reasons of things or the ends of government call for punishment.” We therefore hope we shall not be accused of releasing the mind from all fear of God : we only desire to separate every thing arbitrary and merely human from the just reasons of a rational fear ; lest our filial reverence for the Deity be smothered in the agonies of terror and dismay. Where scripture seems to countenance such desponding feelings, it is taken by the best interpreters for the language of strong passion, excited in the writer by some present urgent cause ; but not as establishing any point of doctrine. Again, where any thing resembling the passions and the acts of man is ascribed to the Deity in Holy Writ, it must be interpreted in

a manner suitable to the divine perfections. What is there termed God's vengeance is his fixed determination to act according to right, and truth, and order ; which is quite sufficient to excite our reasonable fear. It follows, that repentant sorrow must be at all times more just, and rational, and therefore more acceptable unto God, in proportion to the penitent's sense of his own personal transgression deserving punishment ; and when it is less mixed up with the idea of wrath and fury on the part of God. If terror be the best ingredient of repentance, the end will, indeed, be best attained by representing the Deity by the mere human image an earthly, infuriated lord and master. But this is not that " godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation," as is too evident from many an experience : it is more the effect of a distempered body than of an awakened mind convinced of

sin. The physical terrors of disease, the nervous anguish of a disordered brain full of scaring images, are absurdly held by many to be the actual sense and feeling of divine wrath, and the certain sign of complete repentance. The influence of the body on the mind in such cases, and the consequent violent emotions, are too well known to be denied by those who know nothing of nature and its operations, and who choose to call every thing supernatural which is unusual. Such absurdity is too apt to excite ridicule, which may in the end be directed against the genuine doctrines of Christianity. Every feeling built on truth is certainly admissible and beneficial : but when it is coupled with accessory notions, which are weak in themselves, and unworthy of the Deity, they may have much appearance of awful solemnity, and may alarm the mind by anxious terrors, from the very

circumstance of their indistinctness and obscurity ; but they are of no manner of service in promoting true repentance. To talk of experiencing the fury of divine vengeance, and to require the same test from all others ; to insist upon violent emotions, which cannot be derived from any intelligible source, is to do what is warranted neither by scripture nor by a due knowledge of human nature ; and certainly is not of that service to religion which may be fancied. The main and essential point is a lively and powerful sense of God's displeasure against sin. However bitter and painful this thought may be, it would be most unreasonable and wicked to resist it by wilful dissipation, so that it may not have its full effect ; which effect will always be more salutary, in proportion to our own sense of the peculiar odiousness and misery of sin.

Scripture does indeed contain such phrases as “rend your heart,”^a and “turn with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning:” but they cannot be required of all men in their spiritual change, in any other sense than as far as they are the ordinary signs of that deep and unfeigned regret, and shame, and abhorrence, which are usually necessary and essential in this part of repentance: yet it does not follow, that these must be found in the same manner and degree in every individual. The church of Rome does indeed carry what it calls attrition to a great extent, requiring its agonies as a sort of compensating penance: but our divines construe the scripture phrases above quoted into a sorrow, heart-felt and sincere, for having offended a good and gracious God. There are, however, protestants, of more excitability than

^a Joel, ii. 12, 13.

knowledge, who seem to think the high degree of gloom and anguish to which they force their minds, to be an actual compensation and satisfaction for their sins. But the “broken spirit” and the “contrite heart,” which the psalmist^e says will not be despised by God, are opposed by him to the sinner’s heart of stone, and destitute of feeling: they designate a mind which is penetrated with a sense of previous depravity, powerful, full of shame and sorrow. This must be found in every man who is in earnest to turn from sin to God. This is meant by the being “afflicted”, which St. James requires; that is, having a clear and convincing sense of our fall, our degeneracy, our actual misery. The word is applied by St. James particularly, as the context shows, to those who had been entirely given up to pride and sensuality, which

^e Psalm li. 19. ^f James, iv. 9.

are the frequent attendants on abundance. Such phrases, therefore, do not imply a paramount and universal necessity of those violent and overwhelming emotions of terror and despair, which the words are sometimes distorted to signify.

We are then, by all means, to fix true repentant sorrow on its proper grounds ; not upon undefinable mental impressions, nor on debasing notions of the Deity ; but upon a just sense and knowledge of moral evil, considered in itself, and in reference to a God of purity and holiness, who is ever watchful over general order and well-being. So will our repentance be acceptable to him, suitable to our nature, and in accordance with the great purpose for which it is enjoined by the word of God. But then this feeling will be very various in manner and degree : yet where it is most power-

ful, it will always be intelligible ; because it will arise from just conceptions pressing close upon the conscience. It is undoubtedly extravagant to expect, that every penitent must feel the pains of hell and damnation in his soul, as indispensable to true repentance. Scripture teaches no such doctrine, lays no such injunction ; and instances from fact are no authority, except to prove the individual folly. In the absence therefore of revealed command, we must form our judgment from nature, and the laws by which it regulates the changes of the human mind, and we must be careful never unnecessarily to introduce any thing supernatural, and subversive of the order established by the Deity in man's thinking faculty and volition. It cannot be maintained, that the intrinsic magnitude and importance of an object must always, and of necessity excite a propor-

tionate emotion in the mind : if it were so, then must every the smallest act of sin throw the offender into the greatest terror and despair ; because every such act is a virtual departure from God, which is in itself the greatest of all misfortunes. The temperament and natural character of the individual who is to be affected, and that aptitude or inaptitude for feeling, which do not at all depend upon his will, are certainly to be taken into the account, in determining the degree of repentant feeling which ought to arise from a powerful sense of guilt. If this be not wilfully weakened or obstructed, by the diversion of the thoughts to vain and earthly objects ; if the mind be faithfully attentive to the impressions of truth, and of just conceptions of these most interesting concerns ; there can, then, be no sin in any defect of sadness, and no merit in the greatest vehemence of anguish. These

different degrees are not the main point in repentance ; and are therefore not the penitent's concern, if the main point be secured, namely, a change for the better in the affections and the conduct. True indeed it is, that where very little pain is felt for past sin, there is cause for doubt whether the convictions of the Holy Spirit in the conscience, and the consequent feelings have been allowed to have their full effect. But the decision must here depend upon due self-examination, which will ascertain the degree of voluntary resistance to such feelings or the contrary ; and either our comfort or our self-condemnation must be the result. For, that a person who thinks himself deficient in penitential sorrow, should labour forcibly to stir up images of horror in his mind, and to harass himself with coarse and debasing thoughts of divine vengeance ; this is a practice absurd

and useless in itself, and nowhere enjoined in scripture. In many instances natural temperament, education, opinions, modes of transgression, and degrees of guilt, with many other circumstances from without or from within, may be such that the divine light of truth, working on the conscience, shall be diffused over the whole mind with a power more strongly felt, and attended with more penetrating effects. The benefit to such mind will here be very great, inasmuch as these stronger sensations must naturally produce more effectual warning in the future, and more anxious caution against the snares of sin. But, after all, the unfeigned hatred and abhorrence of transgression are the main and essential point to be insisted upon in man's return to God : all besides may be left to the diversities of physical, as well as of moral causes.

The necessity of such harrowing feelings of the divine wrath cannot be admissible for this farther reason, namely, that the penitent is assured in the Gospel of pardoning mercy on the part of God. We have in youth been as early taught the doctrine of Christ's atonement as of God's hatred against sin. Why then must the latter idea alone take exclusive possession of the mind, and force it into such an extreme of inconsolable despair? If there is so much terror in the thought, yet we know that the remedy is close at hand, which will convert our anxious fears into a shame, deep, indeed, and sad, but certainly far more generous, far more acceptable to the Deity. To tremble for a time before the tribunal of heaven, as if a Mediator and Saviour had never been heard of, and then to be at once drawn up out of the desponding gulf by especial news of grace, and filled with joy and

transport ; this seems to bespeak a more measured process than is at all warranted by Holy Writ ; and it will not be easy to reconcile it with the nature of true repentance, and the constitution of the human mind : it is a doctrine built upon error, or upon defective information. It appears to originate in the notion already combated, of minute and personal dealings on the part of God in carrying on man's repentance ; whilst the general and uniform operation of the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with the convictions of God's word upon the conscience, is overlooked. If men thought more worthily of the Deity, and more in accordance with human nature, they would not gratuitously ascribe so much to God's arbitrary will in our pardon and acceptance, in opposition to every just principle of reason. The whole of his counsels with regard to man's salvation is revealed and

known ; the great truths connected with it will work infallibly upon the conscience, if they are not wilfully obstructed : therefore the sense of pardon, which is as clear to the sinner as his guilt, will immediately reach his repentant mind, provided nothing stands in the way. And what else can stand in the way, but a false perversion of the understanding, which for the time entirely excludes and stifles the former consolatory thought, in order to resign the feelings to despair the more completely, and with greater horrors. When the mind has been thus erroneously instructed, and the error derives support from weak and obstinate prejudices, and a natural cast of temper, it may be so far biassed as to think the matter must be so, and that it has accordingly the same experience in itself. But no one can hold this process to be necessary, who knows that every ac-

knowledged, saving truth carries on its work with divine effect, where nothing works in opposition to it ; and that consequently, faith in Christ's redemption exerts its infallible influence without delay to comfort the sincere penitent, if he be not governed by obstinacy and error. We by no means say, that such error is a sin ; for even good men may, perhaps, thus separate, in their own cases, the anguish of repentance from the consolation of pardoning mercy by fixed limits of time ; so that the former must last so long, before the latter can be felt. But whether this must be so ; whether it is actually required by nature, as well as by any beneficial effect to the individual ; whether or not the co-existing certainties of guilt and pardon may and ought to operate with certainty in common and at once ; this is another question, to be determined on the following grounds.

“ We have a powerful conviction of the being of a God of infinite love and goodness. This gracious Being we contravene in his most holy and beneficent purposes even to ourselves, to our utter shame and ruin. We thus compel him to make us feel the misery which naturally, and judicially follows upon sin. Yet he has devised the means of our deliverance by the sacrifice of his own Son. We feel in consequence a mixed sensation of shame and bitter sorrow, of deep repentance that bows us to the earth. We long to return to the God of our salvation. We gladly, and with our whole hearts, resolve to yield ourselves entirely to him in self-devotion, to become thoroughly what he would have us to be. With Luther^s, we now find ‘repentance,’ once the most dreadful word in the Bible, to be full of joy ; since

^s Luthers Werke, 15 B. 507. S. der Hallischen Ausgabe.

we have found that it consists in a change of life and affections from evil unto good; that it begins, proceeds, and ends with the love of God and goodness. We admire the pattern of repentance in the parable of the prodigal son, given us by our Saviour with such profound knowledge of the human heart; in which not one of the essential requisites is wanting: the whole rests upon the son's return unto his father: "I will arise and go unto my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned before heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." In this penitent's frame of mind, and in the whole story of his reconciliation, there is something so affecting, so great and excellent, so perfectly in unison with the intrinsic character of human nature, that we are unable to imagine how any other entirely different rules

and patterns of what is essential to repentance should be thought necessary. We see here no slavish fear, that trembles solely at the thought of the appointed punishment; we find no agonizing despair of desired forgiveness ; no lengthened, desponding moans, which are considered to be indispensable for mitigating the judicial wrath of God. What we really do see, is an instant sense of dreadful destitution in estrangement from God ; the sentence of conscience, that this misery is self-created ; sure trust in God's unalterable mercy, pointing more sharply the stings of regret and shame, but at the same time softening and melting the heart into humiliation and sacred love, and then finally the actual return into his Father's house ; which, joined to the certain hope of kind forgiveness, brings unspeakably sweet comfort to the soul. Such is the repentance which realizes the

picture drawn by our Saviour in the parable, and which is in truth and fact realized in many a happy instance.^h What might have previously past in the prodigal's mind, what stings of conscience, what fears for his condition and its apprehended consequences, what distress and shame pierced and depressed his mind, before he took courage to throw himself into the arms of his offended, but still kind and reconcilable father ; this we neither deny nor disapprove as useless or fanatical. We only conclude from our Lord's silence respecting the existence of such feelings, and from the express naming of his return, that not those feelings, but much rather this return, is the main point in repentance ; that the greater or the less degree of such anguish and sadness makes no difference in the great

^h See Sacks Predigten. 2 Th. 146 S. 1 Th. 123 S.
Th. 253 S.

business of our reconciliation with God, if this be accompanied with an actual, sincere amendment in the whole heart and all its affections. The various and narrow limits of the human faculties may cause the attention to be fixed exclusively for a time upon one idea out of several, with which, however, it is closely connected; so that the views afforded by the other ideas remain meanwhile as obscure and invisible to the mind as if they had no existence. So in sincere repentance, terror and anguish may have the exclusive mastery for a time, without being corrected by the thought of mercy which might have occurred. It is, however, most seriously to be reprobated, that such a state of mind should be made a general rule in the process of repentance; that before the penitent can hope for peace of conscience, he must be racked with frightful anguish for a length of time;

must take pains to place all thoughts of pardon and comfort at a distance; must first feel the agonies of despair, and expect relief solely from a sudden higher, that is, supernatural impression. We do not charge this rigid and absurd requisition upon all who hold the importance of strong feelings in repentance. But it cannot be denied that there are spiritual guides, who carry this matter much farther than is warranted either by Scripture, or by the condition of human nature; and it is fairly allowable to enter our caution against such misconception and abuse. The genuine sorrow of repentance will always retain its just and reasonable value; and it will do so particularly, for its manifest use in promoting the durability of our amendment. In deeply-rooted habits of sin, it is indeed morally impossible for recurring temptations to habitual transgressions to be overcome, except a still

more powerful counterpoise be presented to their strong influence, by the recollection of that intense feeling, which had been before experienced, of deep and piercing anguish and distress, of shame and self-abhorrence. This thought awakens and maintains the wholesome resolution, never to give occasion for such heart-rending anguish in all future time. Yet feelings so genuine and so useful in their effects, are perfectly compatible with the cheering and consoling promises of the gospel ; and are by no means bereft of their tendency to make and to keep us better men ; unless our attention to those promises be wilfully withdrawn, in order to give full scope exclusively to unnecessary fears and terrors. Even God's love and mercy already experienced, and still farther promised,—even the assured hope of pardon, impart a character so affecting, and a direction so salutary to the sorrows of re-

penitance, as to insure the best results both in comfort to the heart and amendment to the life. This is that "godly sorrow," that sorrow which has reference to God, and is awakened by his truths, "that worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of." And now we conceive, that such a frame of mind in man's return to God is quite as acceptable to him, as suitable to his nature and our own, as likely to secure a stedfastness in piety and virtue, as that agonizing despondency, which not merely expects, but seems actually to feel, the sentence of damnation ; and yet is transported in an instant, by some especial, un hoped-for message of grace unto the soul, to the highest pinnacle of heavenly joy and triumph. The judgment on this question must be formed on principles of reason, upon the uniform and clear doctrines of Holy Writ, and on what is compatible with the natural structure

of the human mind ; not merely upon presumptive, individual experiences. We are certain that if this be done, the latter method of repentance will meet with no enlightened advocates. It will no longer be thought necessary, to thrust down the penitent to hell to feel the torments of the damned, before he shall be allowed to find rest and peace : and there will be an end of classing those persons exclusively and alone among the converted and the pardoned, who know how to enumerate minutely and exactly in their own instances, this regular succession of feelings and experiences.

This just and true conception of consoling acceptance and pardoning mercy, which acts as an alleviating and cheering counterpoise to the anxiety of the self-accusing conscience, ought in reason to endear our Redeemer Christ to us in an infinite degree. If we have embraced his

religion, there is nothing in this world more inconsistent with it, and more unaccountable, than cold indifference on our part towards its author, to whom we are so deeply indebted. Who indeed is he, and what is it that we owe unto him? Even his character alone, his qualities and actions, mark him as the greatest among human beings, if there existed no nearer connection between him and our well-being. But his gospel reveals him to us as the author of our recovery from sin, and of our everlasting salvation. It is he who has delivered us from the wretched state into which we had fallen by forsaking God; who has made it possible, that we should escape the sad consequences of our transgressions, which must otherwise have reached us. If these reflections were duly familiar to our minds, our blessed Saviour would be invaluable to our best feelings; and those feelings

would have the best influence upon our lives and affections. Rational beings may be allowed to think rationally on the subject of religion : but it is the best use of reason, not to harden the heart against the most wonderful of all mercies, and the greatest of all benefactors. Reason and philosophy give us no right nor cause to be ashamed of the name and religion of Christ. Why then are his person and merits, to us so infinitely important, to be slighted and forgotten, when the great end of our being is in question ; to which end it is by him alone that we are directly and securely conducted ? It would be more consistent to renounce religion altogether, than to own it, to embrace it, and yet to withhold our heart-felt gratitude from the author of our faith. Our peace and comfort rest upon him entirely and exclusively, because his gospel alone assures our pardon ; and from him too our

moral amendment is most efficaciously derived ; inasmuch as all the motives to a good life are combined in the acceptance of his religion.

On the other hand, this view of our Saviour's character will preclude any notions respecting his person, in reference to religion and to our spiritual welfare, which are of a nature far too coarse, too much allied to sense, and too much tinctured with something bordering upon fanaticism. This is an error much too common, with those who build so much on feelings in religious concerns. Many persons seem to confine their faith in Christ exclusively to a love of his person, bodily considered,—a love made up of images of sense and gross emotions : or it amuses itself with certain delicious mental contemplations, of a nature peculiarly recreating, by which the fancy and the passions are agreeably captivated.

They hold that sort of faith to be much too cold and heartless, which is occupied in embracing and applying with full assent, the whole of Christ's dispensation for our recovery from sin, in immediate reference to ourselves. They find true faith nowhere, except where the senses are powerfully excited ; and where the fancy is intimately occupied with the Redeemer's person, in many a feeling of sympathy, of gladness, or of tenderness. If, however, the attention can extend so far, that, while the fancy is busily employed with the personal form and features of our Saviour, and with the minutest events of his life and circumstances of his actions, the mind shall still be able to keep closely in view the proper and final purpose of the whole, namely, the thorough return of the soul to God ; if besides, it shall remain at full liberty to hold that strict and constant guard over

itself, which is so indispensable to the religious state,—to watch the emotions which rise within, and the temptations to sin which assail without, taking advantage of every occasion that presents itself for the exercise of the Christian virtues ; if all this be done without interruption, we are not inclined to condemn with harshness the indulgence of those fancies, which have more to do with sense than judgment, and which perhaps such persons are naturally disposed to be amused with. If the main point of love to God and goodness be attained, we will hail any means which contribute to it ; and impressive thoughts of the Saviour may be ranked among them. But we would not have attention to such means as consist in the workings of the imagination, to induce a neglect of the end which is to be thereby attained. One class of motives to awakened feeling must not make us

think lightly of all others as inefficient, which have, however, very successfully brought so many minds of equal sincerity to God's service, and to the salvation of their souls. It cannot be denied, that there are individuals who, while they seem determined to have nothing in their thoughts but the image of their Saviour grossly painted to the senses, neglect in consequence many an important concern connected with the due guarding of the conscience, and with the whole conduct of the religious life. This is the error against which we are desirous of giving most serious warning ; and we think that there exists abundant reason, why that warning should not be spared. The inconsiderate use of the following phrases, " seeking Jesus," " finding Christ," " espousing Christ as a bridegroom," " receiving from Christ the kiss of love," and many more of no very decorous semblance,

with the best interpretation of them that it has been hitherto possible to produce, are, however, attended almost unavoidably with this mischievous effect, that weak and simple minds, already too liable to the seductive impressions of the fancy, are thus accustomed to thoughts of a most inordinate, debasing, and unspiritual nature. This could be proved by many revolting instances. Such will unavoidably be the consequence, when we give the respectable names of *heart* and *feeling* to the mere giddy raptures of the fancy ; when we take these as safer guides, which will conduct us farther than reason and just principles distinctly understood ; and when we can no longer prevent this much commended and highly prized process of experiences from degenerating into mere trifling, or into unbridled grossness. Would it not be better, that those Scripture phrases which perhaps give the first

occasion to well-meaning but simple minds of indulging such extravagancies, should by due interpretation be clearly placed in their distinct and real meaning, and that men should be taught, not to look for edification in the outward dress which strikes upon the senses, but in the intrinsic truth which that dress involves. Certain figures and forms of speech which are the best, the fittest, and most useful in a particular language, period, or people, may not be so properly and beneficially employed, when all these circumstances are different. They must be clearly explained, in order to understand the writings in which they occur ; but they must not be erected into standing formulæ of doctrines ; and their bare sound as words is by no means to impart to them an intrinsic character of sanctity, that belongs solely to the essential truths which are contained in

them. This caution is the more necessary, because accessory notions of a prejudicial nature are too often mixed up with them ; and because the common current language furnishes expressions sufficient for the purpose with equal benefit, and without danger.

We should therefore, in figurative language, pay more regard to the proper meaning than to the image in which it is clothed : this will enable us to fix with more success than is done by many persons, the true sense of those phrases which speak of the converting and sanctifying power of Christ. When we hear it so often said, that he who would be really a good man, and fearing God, must go straight to Christ, and yield himself to him to be sanctified and amended ; it appears to us to be indispensably necessary to explain what the phrase really means ; and we think this due to the

great body of Christians, in order to obviate pernicious fanaticism in some, and ungodly ridicule in others. We trust it will not be maintained by any one, that our Saviour, as personally distinguished from the other persons of the Holy Trinity, has at this day any entirely distinct and peculiar dealing with man inwardly in his spiritual change, and in implanting religion in his heart, which is to be separated and distinguished from the operation of the Holy Spirit for this purpose in the mind of man. The language of scripture is too clear upon the subject, and too much in accordance with human nature, to warrant us in thus introducing new mysterious doctrines, which are nowhere revealed in Holy Writ. The awakening, converting, sanctifying grace of Jesus Christ is therefore no other than the ordinary grace of God, which generally amends us by the word,

by its due reception, and its just convictions. If therefore the phrase “to go to Christ, to seek the power of sanctification from and by him,” possess any intelligible meaning, it is this,—to draw from Christ, from his love to man, from his infinite merits with regard to us, such motives and reflections as may work upon the heart; to allow these to become so powerful in us by persevering and sincere attention, as that they may take possession of the whole soul, and draw it unto God. This is that word and those convictions, by means of which the Holy Spirit creates a new life in us. From this we may with reason hope for a pre-eminent effect, because these motives contain so much to affect and penetrate every mind. This may perhaps be likewise called the peculiar work of Christ; because he is not only the object of these strongly influencing reflections, but he is

also, by the revelation of his gospel, the author of them. Yet we are not on this account to deny all power of sanctifying to any other motives, which are derived from truth and from the word of God ; nor are we to ascribe to the person of Christ any exclusive dealings with the human heart, which are unknown to scripture. Should it be imagined, that such clear explanations of these modes of thought which strike upon the senses, destroy their otherwise powerful impression on many simple minds, this would take for granted in those minds a darkness of intellect, and want of comprehension which would have strong claims upon our pity ; but it is our duty to remedy that defect in our fellow-creatures as much as possible, since we ought to consider it, in general, an incumbent occupation of the Christian, to labour that the “ eyes of every man’s understanding

may be enlightened." At least, it is an obligation binding on the conscience, first, not to set so much importance upon these coarse modes of thought as to lose sight of the great and essential object, which is an actual change to goodness in heart and life,— a thing too often thus obscured ; and, secondly, that any pains which may be taken to throw as much light upon such gross ideas as may satisfy the understanding, be not cried down as an employment of unsanctified reason which merits reprobation. When men, either from natural temperament, or because they have been so instructed, find nothing to be edifying, spiritual, or affecting, which does not occupy their thoughts with vivid images and fancies, or set their blood in motion, they are too apt to introduce such gross feelings on all occasions, even the most inapplicable. Accordingly, their love to God is too

often made to consist in certain tender sensations, of a character far too much allied to human passions and conceptions, pourtrayed indeed in colours which are very affecting for many minds, but are in reality not only destitute of all ground of truth, but highly unsuitable to the majesty of the Supreme Being, and often very prejudicial to practical religion. There is much truth in the following observations of the celebrated Wieland : “ When we persuade ourselves that these feelings are the workings of the Deity, and make our love to God to consist essentially in them, we are in danger of falling into very strange absurdities, and of committing great sin, by ascribing to the Spirit of Wisdom the extravagancies of our over-heated fancy. The love of God is the love of order, an active impulse to imitate the perfections of the Deity. It may be said to have existed

in a certain way in Socrates : though this would be enough to condemn it in the estimation of some persons, because Socrates was a heathen. These persons have no other idea of this sacred affection but such as is occupied with sense. They love God as they would love, or have loved an attractive human being. But how can this be acceptable to a God of infinite purity? It is a mere illusion of the fancy. It is the property of love to desire to resemble the beloved object : the more we truly love God, the more we shall resemble him, and become purified from all the dregs of sense.¹" Thus far Wieland. How long will men persist in making religion and grace to consist exclusively in a departure from reason and common sense, in a sport of the senses and the fancy? Must every influence on the mind be supernatural, because it can-

¹ Sammlung einiger prosaischen schriften, 1 Th. 108 S.

not be accounted for nor explained? And is not this the case with every gross and idle religious conceit? It cannot be the method of the Holy Spirit, to excite strong images and passionate feelings in the mind, to be appreciated as his work, without impressing upon them a decisive character, to distinguish them with certainty from the mere work of nature. There is, therefore, no ground for insisting upon the universal necessity of such feelings. They may not be sinful: it is possible they may be harmless to religion; but they cannot be essential to our faith in Christ: and if the influence and fruits of faith are duly exhibited in the conduct, the rational Christian need not envy the enthusiast these little ideal transports.

Many very impressive, and sometimes very highly prized emotions are likewise created in the mind, by a strange kind of

opposition which is commonly fancied to exist between God the Father and the Mediator Christ ; but which it is impossible to admit, because it is entirely without foundation. The Father is represented as a severe and angry judge, not to be approached without immediate destruction : it is in the Son alone that all trust and confidence are to be placed : he by his bloody sacrifice is to appease the furious paroxysms of God's resentment ; and the sinner is, almost in a literal sense, to seek shelter and protection behind the Mediator from the terrors of divine avenging justice. This view of the atonement, which is so derogatory from the attributes of God the Father, would demand our utmost forbearance, if it should be only an overstrained fiction of the poet, and it would better at all times be omitted. But as a doctrine of faith, in which so little pains are taken to clear

up into distinctness those coarse conceits which consist so little with the real truth ; and where it is thought necessary, and essential to religion, to produce excitement in the mind by such wild and agitating impressions ; this cannot possibly be approved by any one who has a just and adequate conception of the nature of the Supreme Being, and of the doctrine of Christ's gospel. It were well to banish at once, and by every possible means, so debasing a notion of the atonement, which ascribes to the Father an absolute hatred of the sinner, passionate, furious, and exasperated ; which is to be softened down to a milder and more gracious temper by the blood and death of Christ. It were well if men were taught more just, more suitable, more amiable notions of God, the first author of all love to us, and of all that tends to our salvation. The Creator and Ruler of

mankind is in his nature as early inclined to mercy and forgiveness as the Mediator Christ : it was even his compassion which ordained Christ's mediation to take place, in order that our deliverance, which he had first in view, might be effected in the most suitable and beneficial manner, without prejudice to the great established laws of his government. No one certainly can pretend to have a more intimate knowledge of the nature of this divine arrangement, and undertake to state it better than eternal Wisdom itself ; which by no means tells us, that it was Christ's sacrifice which moved the Father to love, to pity, and to pardon ; but it tells us the very contrary in these decisive words : "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son^k." The same remarkable truth is repeatedly stated by St. John^l in his own words.

^k John, iii. 16.

^l See 1 John, iv. 9, 10, 19.

We may therefore, from the very first, draw near to God the Father with quite as much confidence as to Christ: although the original, gracious intention of the former was actually completed by the atoning death of the latter; and was by his gospel revealed, and assured to us to our unspeakable comfort. We must at all times be cautious, lest any rhetorical attempt to render this doctrine more interesting by figurative language should be taken for the truth itself; and take care, that the one thing be not lost in the other.

But above all, we cannot conceal our displeasure and regret, that, amidst these so highly extolled feelings, which are to accomplish every thing in our return to God, and in our being brought into union with him, the actual moral amendment of the heart and life are sometimes so undervalued and depreciated. It is

not unusual to state this subject in a manner which is thought extremely edifying and convincing: we will endeavour to see whether it rests upon substantial grounds, and can be made consistent with other well ascertained truths. "The sinner," it is said, "is to be considered as a criminal, against whom a capital verdict has been given: he stands in terror and anguish before the Judge; and has no other wish, no other thought, than that the sentence of death may not be passed upon him; and is not at that time at all concerned about his own personal condition, as to dress and appearance. In that critical moment, he cares little about stripping off his filthy rags, or about getting rid of some loathsome cutaneous disease, because he has something far more urgent to occupy his thoughts; and there will be time enough in future for such ameliorations: pre-

cisely so the sinner, though he is eager for God's mercy, yet pays no attention at first to his amendment. When, however, he is certain of divine forgiveness by an especial message of grace, he then begins to think, that a change for the better might be made in his moral state, which has heretofore been so unseemly, and so hurtful to him." The smallest degree of attentive consideration cannot but perceive, how erroneously man's spiritual recovery is here depicted, and how greatly this similitude abates our horror of guilt itself. It assumes, that moral transgression is not of more consequence in itself, nor in reference to our spiritual well-being, than the loathsome bodily disease of the criminal or his sordid apparel are to his reprieve and temporal welfare; whereas, that very state which is meant to be here represented by the disease or the uncleanly

dress, is precisely the object of God's hatred and displeasure : and how then is it possible, that the mind which is in earnest after God's forgiveness, can be otherwise than as earnestly occupied in putting away all those wilful impurities which are the cause of all the dreaded misery, and are the real hinderance to the exercise of the Judge's clemency ? Suppose a superior had threatened the severest punishment inevitably to any dependent who should neglect his dress ; could an offender well show his earnest desire of forgiveness in any better manner, than by feeling, at the same time, a desire as earnest of actually putting an end to this neglect which made him liable to punishment, and by doing his utmost, in consequence, to remove the object of his superior's displeasure ? If, therefore, a vicious frame of mind and course of life are precisely that which

God hates and abhors, and punishes in man ; that abhorrence, and, of course, the reasonable fear of punishment, must endure as long as man still continues vicious. We have no right to imagine a want of steadiness and uniformity in the exercise of the divine mercy : we are not to think that it is dealt out merely by fits of pity, after the semblance of human passions ; or that it is partial in its applications. The atonement of Christ has made divine mercy to resemble the sun's light, which is every where diffused, and over all men and things, wherever it is admitted, and meets with no obstruction. In man this obstruction consists in the prevailing love of sin : and as this departure from what is innocent, and right, and good, is of infinite importance in its unhappy consequences, the importance must, of necessity, be equally infinite, that this departure should have an end.

If sin be so odious as to excite God's hatred, it ought to create a correspondent sorrow in the sinner: but it would be a surprising inconsistency, that he should earnestly desire to escape the punishment of sin, and yet should not think it at all essential to put away the cause.

This well-grounded view of the subject loses nothing of its truth by another not unusual parallel, which compares the penitent to an invalid, who must take medicine for the recovery of his health, before he can think of rising to pursue his occupation. If, instead of following the physician's directions, he is constantly restless and impatient, has nothing but his business in his thoughts, and is making all sorts of vain attempts to carry it on, which are so absurd as to excite our pity; he will, by these very means, only place the object of his wishes at so much the greater distance. As little can the penitent, it is

said, be at first concerned about his moral change, because he must previously receive by faith the power to effect it. Now, in this parallel there is in truth a total absence of resemblance between the two things compared, in so far as it is meant thereby to controvert our statement. The taking medicine, and the going about the pursuits of our occupation, are two modes of action entirely distinct from each other; if the former can at all be termed an action: and, in the case of the parallel, it is absolutely impossible that both should take place at one and the same time. But do we find the same diversity to exist in the several parts of the process of repentance and amendment? The truth is, that such figurative statements generally place the subject in a false light, and mix up with it something perfectly extraneous: and it would not be difficult, without having

recourse to them, to discover what is simply intrinsic and essential, in the whole of that saving spiritual change which is to take place in and by the penitent, and to form a just conception of it. Let us, however, grant that the pangs of guilt may be paralleled by the pains of sickness ; that faith in Christ and in his gospel are the taking of medicine ; that the practice of virtuous actions is the occupation of the man restored to health : the comparison here certainly is applicable in some points of view. But when we come to inquire more strictly, what precisely is required of the penitent in all these situations, which are stated to be distinct from one another ; what must take place within his mind ; we shall find, that it is always and simply one and the same thing on his part, namely, a practical assent to divine convictions. This single thought, when it is sincere and

carried into effect, “I have until now resisted the power of truth and the influence of the Holy Spirit on my conscience; but I will resist them no longer:” this, in the process of repentance, is both the taking medicine and the pursuing our occupation: and as to the distinctions which are usually made, and the particular names by which persons call them from other views and upon other grounds, the whole are brought by our statement to consist in one common and essential requisite. For, by this simple and unfeigned resolution of yielding to the guidance and teachings of divine grace, as well repentance and faith as godliness of life are attained in their due and proper course. The penitent is influenced by the same sincerity of heart when he assents, first, to the truth, that sin is his greatest shame and his greatest misfortune, and this gives rise to his repent-

ance; next, to the farther truth, that the infinite mercy of God and of the Saviour Christ has, by the work of redemption, effected deliverance from endless misery, and procured the certainty of pardon and salvation for him and for all mankind, and this excites a strong desire of forgiveness, and creates the confidence and joy of faith ; and finally, to the third truth, that a sincere and active obedience towards God, and the proof of it in the practice of every virtue where opportunity may offer, is most highly reasonable in itself, and the greatest happiness to the penitent, and this is followed by the constant exercise of Christian godliness. And now, as our moral depravity and estrangement from God originate precisely in that resistance to the convictions of divine truth which arises from the prevalence of sense ; so the removal of that depravity, and the ceasing of that estrangement,

must from the very first consist precisely in the discontinuance of our resistance, and in our conscientious yielding to those convictions. Anxiety therefore about acquiring a previous power to goodness before we begin to be good is quite superfluous ; for both are in fact one and the same thing ; both depend so entirely upon our simply and actively following that light which is kindled in our consciences by the Spirit of God, that it is impossible to separate the one from the other.

It is objected with some appearance of plausibility, that, however numerous the motives are which are set before us to lead us unto virtue, they only tell us that we ought to be good and virtuous : but of what avail is this, if we are not likewise told whence we are to derive the power of being so ? This power, it is said, must be sought exclusively in the blood

of Christ and in his atonement. All else is cold and impotent morality, and contributes as little to amendment, as though we should talk to a dying man of the excellence and happiness of sound health, and of unfettered activity and exertion. Let us, however, review this question as it really stands, and endeavour to introduce some distinctness into our conceptions : we shall then be able to judge of the force of this objection. The power of willing what is good is in intelligent beings, who are possessed of freedom of action, either referable to the superior degree of active energy original in their nature,—and in this sense man never has the power to will what is good which exists in angels ; or it means the adequate inclination of the will to a suitable object,—and this power accrues exclusively from motives, and such a conviction arising from them as shall, by the

grace of God, possess a sufficient force to incline the will. If, for producing and carrying on Christian amendment, the man must, in the former of these modes, be actually raised in his inward essential faculties from a lower degree of capacity to a higher, and therefore from a human being to an angel; this must be done by a miracle on the part of God; and in that case nothing can possibly depend on man. But when the question is, how the human will, still remaining human, may have sufficient power, with divine assistance, to love and practise the good that comes within its sphere; this can no otherwise be done, than by awakening such thoughts in him as shall be strong enough to bias his inclination. The power of resolving must therefore depend upon the power of the motives that work upon his mind. Tell an irritable man, hat he ought to curb his angry passions

in his behaviour towards his dependents, and he will tell you that he cannot. But bring him suddenly in one of his fits of passion into the presence of his sovereign,—or suppose him to receive some great cause of irritation when already in that presence,—he can do it then. But what gives him that power? nothing but the motive springing from the evil consequences of giving way to an indecorous paroxysm of anger in such a presence: this thought becomes sufficiently powerful in his mind, and works with full force to bend and bias his will; and accordingly it makes that possible for him then, which he at other times found to be impossible. It follows, that the power of earnestly and actively willing any thing stands in a compound relation, as well with the importance of the truth which furnishes the motive, and the magnitude of its connection with our happiness, as also with the force and intensity of its

impression upon the mind. Now, whatever serves to bring a great and genuine motive with full force upon the mind, this so far enables the man to be disposed, to feel, to think, to act accordingly. We would not, therefore, wish to deny the power of really exciting the mind to goodness to any truth which carries with it sufficient influence to incline the will; since in the word of God itself so many truths of various kinds are employed for this purpose. The blessed fruits and happy consequences of a virtuous life, the peace within arising from a conscience void of offence, the unremitting awful sense of God's presence every where, the prospects of a world to come; these, and many other arguments, with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, contribute their influence at all times to incline the mind to good, and move it like so many main-springs with all the power

inherent in them. Sincerity towards God, and honest candour towards ourselves, will not fail to ascertain the motives from which we thus derive the strongest impulse to love and to practise what will make us happy in our own minds, and extend that happiness through all eternity. We shall, then, obey that impulse with all attention and fidelity, without requiring of all our fellow-Christians, who may differ from us so greatly in their frame of mind and circumstances, that they should lay the very same stress that we do upon any particular religious view or principle. To the enlightened Christian, the gospel indisputably furnishes the best impulse and the most powerful motives for our unreserved devotion of ourselves to God's service ; because a real, lively sense of Christ's redemption and of the doctrines connected with it lays hold of the human mind on every side, and brings it into

that direction which is indispensable to its happiness. But this cannot be a just reason for rejecting the use of other salutary motives as entirely inefficient, and for degrading them to the rank of mere heathen principles of moral conduct. Least of all can this be done by those who admit, that the Spirit of God works amendment even by convictions derived from natural truths, upon persons who, without their own fault, are obliged to remain strangers to what the gospel teaches of the Saviour Christ. A good author has the following remark: "If moral truths can by the grace of God create feelings in the human mind, these will always be in unison with those truths. But why cannot the Holy Spirit work the same effect by means of truths derived from nature, when they are known and acknowledged? How else could St. Paul affirm of the heathens, that the contem-

plation of the world's creation and preservation ought to lead them to 'seek the Lord, if haply they might find him?' And when our Lord speaks of persons who shall come from east and west and north and south, and shall sit down together in the kingdom of heaven, he does not mean those who have been united here in the visible communion of the church. We are not therefore to condemn the heathen world collectively as reprobate: but, at the same time, we are not in their salvation unduly and erroneously to attribute any thing to man's mere natural powers which is disallowed them by God's word, and ascribed exclusively to his Holy Spirit.^m" If therefore natural truths can, by the aid of the Spirit of God, make heathens capable of salvation, they cannot lose that power

^m Freundliche unterredungen über die wirkungen der Gnade, 1 Th. 69, 70. S.

when they are presented to the minds of Christians. Yet, while we enforce these natural truths, it would be unwarrantable to lose sight of the more powerful impressions contained in the peculiar doctrines of the gospel to which they properly belong, and by which they ought to be excited. We are not to place a brightly shining light in a corner, much less to extinguish it; and to use instead of it a feebly glimmering lamp, by which the work must be done imperfectly, if not entirely spoiled.

But we return to our subject, how indispensable it is to repentance, even at its very outset, to sin no more, but to enter resolutely upon a virtuous life; and this for a reason too little thought of, namely, that sin is a deadly poison, destructive of soul and body, and will continue so to be until it is done away. It is precisely for this noxious quality that God hates, and

will assuredly punish it. It is, therefore, useless and absurd to long for pardon until the depravity which prevents it is removed: and, recurring to the parallel before adduced, it is an egregious mistake to imagine, that the penitent who is eager for forgiveness can be as little concerned for his moral amendment, as the criminal expecting sentence may be for his bodily cure and cleanliness. Perhaps the following similitude may contribute to place this important subject in a clearer point of view. A people are commonly addicted to the use of a very palatable poison. Great numbers thus destroy their health and lose their lives; and, besides, do infinite mischief to the community by creating infection, and giving occasion to other evils. The sovereign loves his people, is anxious for their welfare, and endeavours to cure this disordered state of things. He enacts whole-

some laws against the practice, and ordains punishments, more dreadful than death itself, to be added to that certain death which the use of the poison will infallibly cause. Multitudes are, in consequence, to die, with additional circumstances of great horror. But the sovereign, in great compassion, thinks how he may save them without infringing upon the fundamental laws of his government. A method is at last devised ; that a wise and benevolent individual, by undergoing a most painful operation, should prepare a remedy composed of his own blood, which shall prevent all the consequences to be dreaded from the widely extended poisoning and infection. Those that cease to use the drug, and will take wholesome nourishment, may be cured of the baneful effects of the poison in their bodies, and will escape the punishment. This wise and merciful arrangement is

announced to all the guilty parties, and the medicine is proffered to them. And now, are they only to tremble at the punishment, and to do no more? Are they merely to implore the sovereign's mercy in agonies of terror; or idly to admire the goodness of the generous mediator? Are they not to bestow a single thought upon subduing their appetite for the poison? But this is precisely what they have most indispensably to do; and it must instantly be done. Agonizing prayers for the sovereign's mercy are otherwise to no purpose: that mercy is already there, before any prayer is offered to obtain it; and is presented, undeserved indeed, to every offender for his acceptance. All the prayers in the world will do no good, unless the cause of death, the poisonous drug, be cast away, and wholesome food be taken in its stead. To separate the

sovereign's mercy from giving up the poison ; solely to implore that mercy which is already offered upon the due conditions, and to leave the disuse of the drug to a future more convenient time ; this would doubtless be the extreme of folly and perverseness, and nothing would be gained by it. To expel the poison from the body is quite as early indispensable as the remission of the punishment, and even more so ; for this depends entirely on the other, and is impossible without it.

The application of this similitude to repentance is clear and perfect. Sin is the moral poison of the soul, the noxious effects of which are by no means removed by the bare remission of its punishment : the propensity must cease, otherwise there can be no inward peace and order. But, that the imbibed poison does not continue deadly in its effects after it is for-

borne,— that the threatened punishment does not take place,— this is to be imputed to the interposed mediation, and to the consequent pardon. Thus we see what boundless gratitude is due from the repentant sinner to his divine Redeemer, and how much depends upon his practical acceptance of the atonement.

We find it farther necessary to state our opinion here, respecting those notions on the subject of prayer for grace and mercy, which occur in many works, and in discourses from the pulpit: it is painful to find them so often at variance with truth and reason, and unworthy of the majesty and goodness of the Deity. It is said, that the penitent must groan in agony for mercy, must grovel like a worm in the dust before the throne of God, and never cease until he is accepted. Now, what can all this really mean? We by no means say, that all who indulge

such views and feelings may not be otherwise good men ; nor do we, on that account, pretend to exclude them from divine mercy. A powerful and passionate sense of spiritual wretchedness, which is not to be consoled but by divine compassion, may produce such effects in persons whose views are narrow, and their understandings uninformed. But it is a very different question, whether sound religious knowledge, and more enlarged views may not certainly lead to the same result ; whether it be warrantable, to insist upon such a way of thinking as absolutely and universally indispensable ; or, at least, to recommend it as a superior criterion of true and genuine repentance. It is, in truth, a mode of edification of mere human contrivance, not a word of which is to be found in Scripture. Either we are, by the removal of wilful obstructions, become

capable of divine mercy, have really yielded unto the Spirit of truth in full conviction and abhorrence of our sins, and have formed the sincere resolution of a virtuous life, which cannot be separated from them, or it is not so. In the former case, what is the object of our agonizing cries for mercy, and, to use the favourite term, our wrestling for grace? Recurring to a former, perhaps too familiar, but just similitude, we ask, when the windows are open, what need of cries and moans to intreat the sunbeams to enter? But if the wilful resistance of our minds has not so far ceased, that an actual moral change may take place in them, all cries for mercy will be in vain ; nay, it will amount to a bold and impious presumption, to pray for the pardon of sin with a mind still wilfully devoted to it. Away for ever with a notion of prayer so unworthy of the Deity, as that by perse-

vering importunity something may be extorted from him, which it were otherwise unsuitable to his attributes and designs to grant. There is indeed a parable, in which a friend complies with his friend's request, not from motives of friendship, but because of his importunity. But it would be dishonouring God in the highest degree, to apply this parable to the efficacy of prayer farther than this,—that the good gifts of God, and particularly those of amendment and salvation, are sooner obtained by perseverance in prayer, because this is a sign, and, at the same time, an effect of inward sincerity of heart, of a deep sense of our entire dependence on God's grace and mercy, and of our active and unfeigned endeavours for the attainment of the good for which we pray. It is precisely to such a frame of mind, in preference to any other, that divine wisdom is in its very

nature disposed to grant the subject of the prayer. We are therefore far from saying, that prayer for grace and divine acceptance is unnecessary ; since it is by such prayer as we have now stated that the soul is best prepared to receive them ; — consequently, the uniform direction of our desires to God, who is the fountain of every good, is so extremely beneficial. The more the mind is occupied with thoughts of God, under this powerful sense of its own wants and of his all-sufficiency, and earnestly desires to be more and more closely united with him, the greater in consequence will be its impulse and its power to become thoroughly good and happy. So, the eye must face the light to receive its rays in perfect clearness. It may be generally affirmed, that religion is infinitely the loser, when the great utility and efficacy of prayer for producing sanctification is not

duly regarded and enforced, since they are in clear accordance with the reason of the thing. What can be more fit and proper to ask of God than the sanctification of our hearts and lives? Can he bestow a greater blessing on us than a good and well-disposed mind, ever anxious, ever labouring to be better? The blessed efficacy of prayer is undeniably proved by its moral result in the mind and conduct, of which every good man is perfectly conscious. Every motive to virtue, and every power to goodness must be incalculably augmented in force and influence, when we speak of them immediately to Almighty God in prayer; when, fully convinced of our own dependence and inability to good, and of the inestimable value of a mind at peace, and a conscience void of offence, we humbly pray to him, who bestows all the inward and the outward means of amend-

ment, that he would by these means make us good and virtuous men. Even the very sincerity of our purpose to be good cannot be more powerfully awakened and sustained than by such prayer. We cannot have the presumption to tell the Searcher of all hearts, that we want to be relieved from imperfections,—to be made more humble, meek, contented, benevolent, and stedfast,—without bringing more earnestness, sincerity, and effect into our will and resolution. Hypocrisy and falsehood cannot go so far; and it is always easier to be insincere in our intercourse with our own hearts, than in that which is premeditated with an all-knowing God. Every good man's experience may in general decide upon this efficacy of prayer. When he seriously endeavours to be good, asks the power to be so of the only Giver of all goodness, and expresses this desire, so rational

in itself, and so suitable to a being of such high spiritual destinies, with the warmest aspirations of the soul ; he will then be able to tell us how much he is the gainer ; whether he does not always rise better disposed, if not actually a better man, from such sacred moments of the devotion of the closet ; whether his heart is not more warmed with the love of truth and goodness, more animated with ingenuous resolutions, more filled with powerful and active impulses to despise the low attractions of vanity and sin, to tread the thorny paths of order and of duty, and, in spite of so many hinderances and difficulties, to cultivate peace of mind and elevation of soul in an unstained conscience, and in the favour of Almighty God. To pray for power to be good, with the certain conviction that the divine assistance will never permit the efforts and purposes of

sincerity to be vain and fruitless,—this cannot fail of winging the soul with more power to rise above the world ; of inspiring the mind with greater warmth, and more assured confidence ; and consequently of rendering our progress in a life of virtue more rapid, and more satisfactory to our feelings. We are of opinion, that there never has existed a really good man, who has undervalued or neglected this great and decisive means of promoting his amendment. Such is the high value of prayer in religion. But as to cries and moans for mercy, taken separately from active endeavours after moral goodness, and considered as a mere machine to extort forgiveness, they are void of reason, degrade the Deity to a level with feeble mortals, and lose sight of those universal laws and principles by which his actions are invariably regulated.

Such notions respecting prayer perhaps originate in an indistinct misconception: so that in fact, while men are imploring grace and mercy, they mean only that soothing and refreshing sensation which arises from their having been obtained. And so far indulgence may be allowed to this kind of prayer, because such a sensation is more desirable than the absence of it. But it must be granted upon all hands, that it is not at all essential to a state of favour with God, and to the whole of our spiritual welfare. No person therefore can be justified in vehement wrestlings and importunities for this end, which are never to cease until this mercy or that peculiar feeling which is so much desired be obtained; no more than he would be doing right to importune the Deity, until he succeeded in his petition for any other species of gratification. We ought to

give up generally the ungrounded notion, that mental feelings, whether pleasing or the contrary, where we know nothing of their cause or origin, are of any great importance and necessity in religion. It far more behoves us to learn, first, how to value and then to secure *that* comfort and *that* peace, which clearly and intelligibly spring from a strong and convincing persuasion of our actual religious and virtuous condition, and from the divine complacency which attends it. We shall not, then, with such restless eagerness pine and sigh after other hidden, mystic, spiritual delights; because to do so will not, and cannot be very easily acquitted of the guilt of tempting God.

From a similar misconception doubtless it is so often asserted, that sincere penitents frequently find it difficult to have faith. The meaning must certainly be this — that those persons, notwithstanding-

ing their unfeigned return to God, cannot find that sense of comfort which they desire. Yet, the real and thorough assent to and acceptance of God's gracious promises in Christ, which are the very essence of faith, cannot well be wanting in any persons who profess religion in its sound and genuine principles, and cherish no wilful disorder in their hearts. The position that what is open generally to all is likewise open to every individual separately, under the implied conditions, is so clear and intelligible, that it must occur to every common understanding, in which the light of truth is not extinguished or obscured by wild and unfounded prejudices. Narrow views, indeed, and undue attention may here again have their evil consequences. If the sense of individual guilt, and liability to punishment is for a length of time the object which exclusively takes possession

of the mind, and merges every other thought with powerful intensity in this alone ; it will, then, be by no means an easy thing to fix the attention at the same time upon other views, so as to comprehend them with sufficient clearness. It is precisely the same in all similar cases, according to those laws by which nature regulates the thinking faculty : and therefore we are not to look for any thing different or peculiar in this case. It follows, that there would often be not so much difficulty in attaining to the real joy and consolation of faith, were it not obstructed by error and deficiency in religious views and knowledge ; and especially, did not persons who complain of not having faith, long for a species of inward comfort and assurance, which they expect will be something very different from that peace of mind, that springs from a consciousness of sincere devotion

to God, and of a consequent communion with him in Christ ; a peace and comfort, which perhaps those persons think far too natural and too cold. When this peace and comfort are thus undervalued ; when the individual torments himself with impatient fears because he feels no such peculiar consolations ; when he persuades himself to expect a particular notification from above, to announce his being justified and accepted, of which Scripture says not a word : that man will of course often find it difficult enough to have faith ; but it will be entirely his own fault. The truth is, that he will not find it easy to be inwardly assured of his faith in the way that he has chosen for himself, but which has nowhere been promised, and which he fancies to be the only divine assurance that can be attained. When any man, with resolved sincerity and upon sure con-

victions, embraces the gospel of Christ, his atonement and mediation, and all that he has done and suffered for our salvation, so that his affections and his conduct are ruled and guided by these principles ; that man has faith in the true and genuine sense of the word : and there can be no difficulty in his coming to an assurance of his being in the right way. The faith which is really necessary to salvation is infallibly given and continued by God to every individual, who does not wilfully resist the just convictions of his own mind. And, as to what God does not give him, where the fault is not his own, and where there is no such wilful resistance deserving punishment, this is not the faith which is necessary to salvation.

We repeat our declaration, that we by no means wish to dispute every part of the religion of those persons who fami-

liarly entertain, and highly cherish, those views of it which we have been endeavouring to prove erroneous: we only desire to prevent those views from being considered as absolutely essential and indispensable. We think our arguments ought to make it clear to those who will lend their attention, and think without prejudice, that all such feelings and experiences cannot be the genuine, sure, universal, and indispensable signs by which the truth of our religion, and the assurance of our being in God's favour, must be judged of and ascertained. There will always exist a number of circumstances, internal and external, which may create a very great difference: and it will follow, that where the supernatural assurance of grace, and faith, and mercy are exclusively, or even principally, built on the feelings in question, many a mind which is sincerely good, and therefore

pleasing unto God, shall be placed in the greatest anxiety and distress without the smallest reason in the world. We will quote a French author on this subject : “ Certain writers lay great stress on the *sensible refreshings* which the grace of God sheds abroad in the human heart, on the *inward consolations*, and *spiritual joys*, which flow as consequences and effects from the union of the soul with God. But we do not think that any dependence is to be placed upon them, because they are a criterion which really possesses none of the conditions that can furnish sufficient certainty. In the first place, there is no doubt that there are many sincere believers who feel nothing of the kind in themselves, but rather pass their lives in constant uneasiness and anxiety ; whether natural temperament, or preconceived opinion, or whatever else may be the cause. I had occasion, not long since,

to visit a young ecclesiastic of exemplary conduct in his sickness. He laid before me his anxious thoughts and feelings ; and when I enquired into their cause, I found it to be this,—that he felt not within him those *delights* and *transports* of which I am now speaking ; that he never heard at the bottom of his heart that voice of comfort of the Holy Spirit, with which it ‘ beareth witness to our spirit that we are the children of God.’ I did not fail to point out his error to him in this particular, and to show him what little right he could have to rest upon so uncertain a sign. I laid before him those signs which I mean to bring forward in the sequel [the Christian virtues.] I convinced him that these were not of my own invention, but evidently grounded on Holy Writ. I intreated him to make the application of them to himself ; and when I had prevailed upon him so to do, I

brought him, by means of his answers to my questions, to this conviction,—that he could, upon the whole, entertain all possible certainty of his adoption, and of his being in a state of favour with Almighty God. In short, I did not leave him until he appeared to me to be entirely freed from his distress of mind; and a few days after he made a truly Christian end. In the next place, these inward delightful feelings are of such a nature, as to be boasted of by not a few who are still actually impenitent sinners. There is hardly a religious sect to be found, in which great numbers of its members do not lay claim to them. It will probably be said, that there is a great difference between the *workings of grace* and those of self-deception and of prejudice; and this we by no means deny. But is any man able to mark the distinction in an exact and intelligible manner? Can that

distinction be so clearly pourtrayed, that every individual may perceive the difference without danger of mistake? If this can be done, why is it not done? Why is not the world at large made acquainted with this criterion, which, beyond all doubt, it would be very glad to know? For I do not remember to have found any thing of the kind in the books which treat of it. They rather tell us, that these are matters which cannot be expressed by words. And if they cannot, it is a sufficient proof that this method is entirely useless, and cannot be employed^a. ”

But though such anxious disquietudes do not prove the absence of grace, or exclusion from it, but arise from contracted views, or from a distempered state of body or mind, it does not follow from

^a *Traité de la Justification, par Jean la Placette,*
p. 389. Amst. 1733.

that state, that there is no necessity for intercourse with God by prayer, and ardent longing for his help. This very depression of mind itself, which God permits perhaps for the purpose of humiliation, though it may arise from a natural cause, and have so much resemblance to actual disease, is certainly so peculiarly severe a suffering, as to stand in much greater need of the aid of the merciful Author of life, to sustain in its due place and order the work of his own hands, the human soul and body, or to restore them. It is in this sense that Bishop Green interprets the fervent prayers of the Psalmist, and of other pious men, who are urged by their disconsolate feelings to seek comfort from their Maker. He farther adds, "This religious duty is the most effectual panacea that we can have recourse to; and if it should not quite remove the disorders, it will much alle-

viate them, if persons persevere in a due and constant course, or be instant in it. Reason and prudence will direct persons not to give way to melancholy fears and uncomfortable thoughts ; but endeavour to set things in such a light as may best promote an inward complacency of mind ; and to use all lawful means in their power to make life comfortable and easy ; which must be effected by the means which true religion will afford them. On the contrary, ‘ trembling and astonishment of heart’ was one of the curses denounced of old against disobedience.^p”

The same arguments will determine another question, often started and urged as of considerable importance ; whether it be necessary to note the particular time of our spiritual change. It is said, that if extraordinary religious feelings are of such

^o Deut. xxviii. 65.

^p Green’s Dissertation on Enthusiasm, p. 115.
Lond. 1755.

consequence in ascertaining the existence of that change, it follows that precisely by their means the very time of the change is marked in the most exact and decisive manner. There will be a certain determined and limited point, from which the individual will be conscious in all future time of the transition from the service of sin to communion with God ; and he that takes this for granted, thinks himself entitled to require the same test of change from every one else. But we have shown that there is no warrant for presupposing any such thing ; and this ought in all reason to restrain us from erecting such a notice of particular time into a constant and infallible test of true repentance. We admit that the time of this change is remarkable enough in some persons and circumstances. We are even certain, that, in the case of many who now claim to be religious and reformed,

the frame of their mind before their change, the nature of their previous lives, and the manner in which the convictions of truth took place in them, must certainly and necessarily enable them to ascertain the precise time and the particular circumstances of their change, if it have really taken place: and they would have great reason to entertain the strongest suspicion that it had never done so, if they did not know the precise time of its being done. For what are we to think of those whose lives have passed in a constant succession of vicious indulgences and wicked acts, and who are otherwise of strong sensibility, which is easily excited to a high degree,—what are we to think of them, when they tell us, that they are really become quite different men by the grace of God; and yet they do not remember when this salutary change began,—they are entirely

ignorant when, and on what occasion, they ceased to find their usual pleasure in committing sin ; and there remains not a single trace in their minds of what they at that time felt, though those minds be otherwise open to every acute and powerful impression ? Can they have acquired so different a direction of their inclinations and affections, so opposite to those which governed them before ; and can they have lost all recollection on the subject ? This stands in direct contradiction to our usual ways of thinking ; and it is certainly no want of Christian charity to say of such a person, that he is not changed at all.

But this exactness in noticing the time of our spiritual change cannot be established as a general and necessary criterion. Where there has been no previous inveterate habit of vicious action or indulgence ; where the mind has only been

too vain and thoughtless, too fond of the profits or the pleasures of the present scene, yet still abhorring conscientiously all actual transgressions ; where moreover the temper is not formed for acute and powerful sensations ; — there the ascendancy of religious convictions may be so gradual and imperceptible, that the precise moment of their preponderance cannot be ascertained in the sequel. A warning enters the mind, and is attended to ; but in the rapid succession of earthly thoughts and occupations, it is very soon lost. The same or a similar memento shall arrest the attention a second time, and with a more serious effect ; but a second time the voice of conscience is drowned. More impressions follow : they come at last to resolutions, weak indeed and wavering from time to time, but again awakened, and finally confirmed and completed. Now, who shall say what length

of time may have passed during all this process? and therefore who can fix the moment when the change did actually take place? Thus much the man knows, and if he has always been heretofore vain and inconsiderate, he cannot but know, that he is now quite of another mind. If he is assured of this, he has all reason to be easy and satisfied, although he cannot fix the precise date of that which gives him this assurance. The sick man recovers from a tedious illness. His recovery has been so gradual that he cannot tell exactly when it began: it is enough that he is perfectly conscious of being better, and his looks confirm it. He would be very absurd to doubt of his convalescence, because he cannot recollect the hour when his disorder took a turn; or cannot name the medicine that began to give him relief. The case is the same with many persons who give up the love

of the world for the love of God. No objection to our argument can be drawn from the numerous sudden conversions to Christianity, which are recorded in the New Testament, and which were attended with very remarkable circumstances. In these the parties were at once enlightened and convinced, and usually by miracles, of a religion unknown to them before, and were immediately brought into a correspondent frame of mind. Here is a marked distinction from the case where truths, habitually known from early life, at length obtain their due influence upon the conscience. But we have already declared, we do not generally deny, that many persons in the present day may and ought to know the precise time when the great and saving change took place in them; for in their cases the mind is more roused, the feelings are more intense, and of course the memory

is far more deeply impressed with the recollection of them.

And now, as it would be too much to expect a truly good man in all cases to fix the precise moment of his change ; so it is possible, that many may pretend to do so who are strangers to any change at all. Circumstances may give occasion to vehement emotions, which are taken for undoubted symptoms of that change. Anguish and terror, and then joy and triumph, may have so powerfully occupied the mind, that the remembrance of them, with all their circumstances, remains indelible. It is, however, very possible, that there may not exist at the bottom of the heart a prevailing love of God and goodness : the party may not have become radically a better and more virtuous man than he was before. In this case he will have deceived himself and others, in pretending to state the precise

time when his repentance began, and the feelings which accompanied it, for it will be merely an opinion : he would have it be said that he is changed, but in reality he is what he was before.

Thus the uncertainty of all such experiences brings us back to the only true and universal test, built upon the word of God, and drawn from the nature of religion,—a test and criterion far more valuable than any emotions of terror or of joy ;—and this is the consciousness of prevailing right affections, practically exhibited in a thorough and stedfast course of duty towards God and man. It is strange, that, where Scripture is admitted, any other sign of the religious state should be desired and invented as more decisive. A long list of passages in Holy Writ informs us, that only those are pleasing in the sight of God who make it the chief business of their lives

to please him by doing what is just and right. The third chapter of the First Epistle of St. John furnishes proof enough in many passages. When he says, “ Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doeth righteousness is righteous^q;” one might suppose he glanced at many present teachers, who hold a very different language. Let no one pretend to construe this phrase into a mere negative test. The words manifestly contain an express affirmative criterion : “ he that doeth righteousness” can, precisely for that reason, assure himself that he is righteous. Not only are all the testimonies of this chapter equally decisive, but the whole Bible says the very same thing to every one who will not mix up with its declarations his own preconceived notions, but is content to take his notions exclusively from Holy

^q 1 John, iii. 7. ^r 1 John, iii. 10. 14. 19. 21. 24.

Writ. It is the certain tendency of the doctrine in dispute to undervalue moral goodness, and to place it in the back-ground, to the very great prejudice of religion ; thus most unwarrantably separating two things which cannot be disunited without infinite harm to both.

When we speak of moral goodness, we do not confine it to works, if these are considered as external or individual acts conformable to the law. Such external acts, although they will follow of course from a good principle in the heart, are assuredly very far from being that which God principally requires in man, and which naturally confers upon him his moral worth. This ought to be understood and confessed on all hands. It is, therefore, the more extraordinary, that those who speak contemptuously of virtue and moral goodness, should always dwell on the works of the law, or Phari-

saical righteousness, and endeavour to confound the one with the other, as if they were identically the same. This furnishes them with a specious pretence to refer to inward righteousness of heart all that can only be said to mark the insignificancy of ceremonies alone, or of individual external acts. As a want of candour, this artifice deserves our reprobation : if it be mere ignorance, it is disgraceful. It ought, once for all, to be known and to be remembered, that by virtue and moral goodness is to be understood the inward order and harmony of the affections, a thorough and predominant love of that which is right and good. It therefore calls for no small exercise of patience to observe continually that, notwithstanding the clearest and most circumstantial explanations, all is still referred to works, to insulated good actions ; while we hear many a

reproach and imputation often cast upon them, which, however, mean nothing at all, if any attention be paid to those explanations. The question turns upon an altered and good direction of the mind, which now seriously yields to the convictions of truth, and obeys them willingly. This is evidently a business of the will: and it is the will, when guided by truth, and to its proper object, that constitutes inward righteousness: for we know of no other idea which can be affixed to this word by the common use of language. Now, though it be asserted, that divine acceptance, the pardon of sin, and communion with God, are ever so antecedent to moral goodness in our external conduct, and to the commencement of what are called good works; no one, however, can possibly wish to give them an earlier existence than this good alteration of the will. We hope it is con-

fessed on all hands, that no state of favour with God, no salvation of the soul, can be conceived to take place before repentance. If this be admitted, namely, that actual repentance must precede the state of grace, then we have in that an altered and amended direction of the will : we have that which, as we said before, properly constitutes the essence of inward righteousness. Without our unfeigned yielding to the first convictions of truth upon the conscience, there can be no regret for sin committed, no humbling of the soul before God, no longing for his pardoning mercy, no faith begun nor brought to effect : but this unfeigned yielding is in reality inward righteousness awakened in us, advancing always to more and more perfection. The heart has now a different aim, a different good, a different main object from that which it pursued before, and in which it had placed its happiness.

The commencement of repentance is also the commencement of a righteous frame of mind ; and the whole of the good life which follows is only its progress and increase. Taken in this light, which it is not easy to dispute, it is as impossible to separate repentance and faith from inward righteousness of heart, as from the subsequent practice of virtue in good works which really deserve that name. There is no objection to these works being called the effects and fruits of faith, and they may be allowed to be preceded by divine acceptance, and an interest in salvation. But as to the sincere direction of the will to good, which is inseparable from the abhorrence of sin ; this cannot be considered as a mere effect and consequence of pardon already obtained and fully assured, unless we mean to dishonour God so far as to suppose, that he can accept any man whose heart is still un-

changed, and that such a man can possibly be an object of the divine complacency. This very erroneous doctrine cannot fail of inducing such a degree of supineness, as shall leave the correction of the will so far behind, that it is at last, perhaps, thought of no consequence whether it be corrected or not. It is too evident, that a doctrine of this kind must prevent all the good effects which may be expected from the preaching of the gospel. Whatever may be said on the other side, we must hold fast to that which Scripture teaches us,—namely, that an actual change of mind, an amended heart, a new direction of the will to good, are, in the very nature of the thing, indispensable qualities, which are previously required to make us capable of the pardon of sin and the favour of God.⁵ First comes repentance,—that is

⁵ Luke, xxiv. 47.

a real change of mind, an inward striving after a more excellent object,—and then comes the pardon of sin. Such is the order in which salvation is to be preached to the world in the name of Jesus Christ. Man must first “repent, that his sins may be blotted out.”¹ His eyes must first be opened, that he may “turn from darkness unto light, to receive forgiveness of sins.”² If these and many other Scripture expressions be taken in their full and true meaning,—and if it be admitted in consequence, that this direction of the mind to truth constitutes the essence of Christian righteousness, which is to be exemplified in its practical application on all due occasions,—it will be impossible for any one to consider it as a mere fruit and effect of divine acceptance. It is therefore an undeniable truth, that this righteousness, this sincere and practical

¹ Acts, iii. 19. ² Acts, xxvi. 18.

assent to the convictions of divine truth, is, on the part of man, the main and essential point in the business of his salvation ; is that which is required of him before all other things ; because every thing else is comprehended in it, or infallibly follows from it. What is devised or done by God independently of man, in order that he may be pardoned and accepted; what divine wisdom and compassion has found necessary in order to do away the guilt and punishment of sin, and to which man could contribute nothing ; this will ever be the object of our most grateful adoration, and the sure foundation of our humblest confidence. But it will also be a thing entirely distinct from what must take place in man, what must be done by him, if this great mercy is to be of any benefit to himself. This can no otherwise be effected than by his ready and free acceptance of all the truths connected

with it,—which is of course a business of his will,—for the will is exerted as much in repentance and faith as it is in sanctification ; and this virtuous exertion of the will is genuine righteousness. For whatever can be required of man must be required of his will : and when this has received its due direction, by means of those just views and convictions which work upon it, it makes us righteous. It is our reverence for the genuine sense of Scripture, and our earnest desire to remove all misconception and abuse of Christ's gospel, and all hinderance to its beneficial effects, which have induced us to dwell so much upon this important subject. The mischief arises from employing scientific terms of human invention in common religious instruction. This might well have been thought necessary by the first reformers in combating the errors of popery ; especially in disproving

the sufficiency of what were termed good works by the Romanists, and in denying the merit of works in general. These terms were accordingly introduced familiarly into books and sermons ; but they are, in truth, so distant from men's ordinary way of thinking, as to be incapable of becoming practical principles ever present to influence the affections and the conduct. In the common state of men's minds and behaviour, they could not employ them as a rule : they were taken up only when there was occasion for excuses in acting wrong. This they would not have found so easy to do, if they had been satisfied, as common sense directed, with the real nature of the thing in question ; for it might have been expressed with sufficient force and clearness in the current language, without the use of scientific words. We should not then have heard of an antecedent faith in itself

sufficient to salvation, which is allowed, forsooth, to draw after it in the sequel an altered and amended frame of mind and conduct, but only as a mere consequence, a bare effect, and nothing farther ; a doctrine which is liable to the most pernicious and almost unavoidable abuse.

It is no substantial objection to say, that if the only infallible criterion of true repentance be a better frame of mind created by the convictions of divine truth, the death-bed penitent can have no assurance of his acceptance with God, because he will have had no time for the exercise of the moral virtues which are affirmed to be the evidence of such a frame of mind ; that therefore another separate means is necessary to attain to that assurance ; and this must be an especial feeling of mercy obtained, and sin forgiven, imparted immediately to the penitent. But the persons who make this objection must

either be determined to know nothing of any other virtue but what consists in its outward acts ; or, if they admit that the essence of virtue consists in the altered inclination of the mind, which is now directed unto good with preponderating force, they must likewise admit that repentance, without such essential virtue, can as little be imagined as a resurrection without life. If then the dying man is a real penitent, that is, if an actually saving change has taken place within him,—if he is otherwise and better disposed in mind than he was before,—this is genuine righteousness, commencing indeed, but so far true in its essential quality ; and there is no particular length of succeeding time indispensable for the abhorrence of his former sins, because that abhorrence is already existing as a necessary constituent of righteousness. The same may be said of longing for grace and mercy, of

prayer to God, the love of God and man, patience under suffering and pain, resignation to the divine will, and the resolution never more, for all that the world can offer, to commit a premeditated and wilful sin. That salutary change of mind to which we have given the name of righteousness, comprehends all these ; and if the penitent have actually undergone this change, he stands in need of no farther time to evince the sincerity of his repentance : that repentance has already taken place. But if the time be found too short for these, or any essential part of these, to be effected ; then, let any one tell us, whether it be not likewise too short for true penitence itself, and for the acceptance which must depend upon it ; whether the “ laying hold on Christ’s merits by faith,” —an unscriptural metaphor, which we could wish to see more frequently placed in an intelligible light,

and not contradictory to Holy Writ, to avoid misconception and abuse,—whether the doing this in the usual compendious manner, can include in it sincerity of heart, the direction of the will to truth, and consequently a righteous frame of mind ; whether the man cannot know, and is not bound to know, that he possesses it ? While this is doubtful, and he is not inwardly conscious of such a change, so long we hold it to be highly dangerous to give him hopes of another kind of assurance of grace obtained, and to direct him to depend upon it. But, if this new frame of mind be actually attained, he has the authority of Holy Writ for holding it to be a sure sign of his having entered into friendship with God ; and he stands in no need of any particular acts of virtue to be superadded, for which he has neither time nor opportunity. Virtue is essentially simple in its nature,

and its seat is in the heart. It is that predominant love of God, of order, of the dictates of conscience, of all that is right and good, which stands opposed to the love of the world and sin. Its farther demonstrations follow of course, in the various occasions and circumstances which may present themselves. But the frame of mind itself which we have stated, cannot for a moment be separated from true repentance, as things distinct. As life immediately begins where death ceases, so instantaneously does this saving change of mind include in it a better direction of the will and the affections ; and that is virtue. If we suppose a state, in which it is still uncertain whether a man, at the bottom of his heart and in his prevailing inclinations, be still evil, or be now turned to good, his acceptance with God must remain equally uncertain : otherwise the word of God would teach us a different

lesson from that which we find it really to contain. The world indeed often gives the name of virtue to mere insulated acts, in which the right direction of the heart to God bears no part at all. Instances of magnanimity, justice, integrity, disinterestedness, may occur in men who are perfect strangers to all religious motive ; and these shall have the name of virtue. For this we are not answerable : it is an illusion that we by no means undertake to defend. We think we have said enough, and some may think too much, to explain what we mean by virtue, by righteousness, by moral goodness, when we require them as indispensable to the assurance of our acceptance with God, and of our hopes of being saved.

It may still be said, that if righteous affections are to be the only certain criterion of salvation, it must first be determined how many virtuous actions are

required to form it. Now, it is strange that persons should know so little of Christian piety and amendment, as to confound them perpetually with insulated acts and demonstrations. We repeat it again, that that man is truly amended in his heart, who has unfeignedly made choice of God and God's good pleasure for the highest and final object of his most ardent desires. It is this direction of the mind that forms the good and virtuous man. This commences with repentance, and lasts through life, with a growth stronger or more feeble in its progress and increase. It is the straight and only road that brings us still nearer to our object,—to that perfect happiness which springs from union with God; that is, from the knowledge and love of God; and which is still increasing in proportion to our progress in amendment. If a traveller wishes to be informed, whether

he is going the right road to a certain place, he would, with reason, think it very strange to be told, that we could not exactly inform him, until we had first learnt from him how many steps he had already made upon the road which he had hitherto travelled. The direction in which he had come, and the place to which he was proceeding, might be sufficient to procure him the answer to his question, without troubling him with any inquiry. But, of course, no traveller in his senses would need to be told, that he must not stand still upon the road: still less must he deviate from its true direction, if he mean to reach the place of his destination. But, if the whole of the fancied difficulty rest upon this,—that no man can be certain of his actually possessing a righteous frame of mind; that he cannot know infallibly, whether his heart be inclined to God or to the present

world ; we have nothing else to do, but to appeal to the test which every sincere and attentive mind may derive from the trial of his own life, and conduct, and affections, by the rule of God's word ; to the precepts and injunctions of which word we must finally refer him.* Whoever knows not how to determine, whether he prefers God and conscience to all other things ; whether he is from his heart in earnest, from a convincing faith in God and Christ, to hate and shun what he most loved and sought in his previous unrepentant state ; or whether he still wilfully sacrifices his better views and convictions to the allurements of sin ; whoever can remain uncertain on these points, that man must make his account with being at least as uncertain of his salvation. These assurances are so closely united together by the whole tenour of

* See 2 Cor. xiii. 5. Galat. vi. 4.

Holy Writ, that where the former fails, the latter also can have no existence. But it is certain, that no persons could continue so extremely ignorant of themselves, and of the condition of their own hearts, if they only felt the indispensable necessity of this self-knowledge, and were taught the proper means of attaining to it. The soul's sincere desire of pleasing God by good affections, cannot easily remain a secret, or even a doubt, to a man's own mind.

But this prevailing virtuous frame of mind does not at last amount to the smallest degree of merit. When we find from many persons' religious history, that they insist on knowing nothing of any moral righteousness, and hold it for mere trifling to be well-disposed towards God and man; we may so far concede to them, that the best possible direction of the affections makes not the smallest

amends for previous transgression, and furnishes no claim at all to reward, and the happiness ordained for the good. These now are, have always been, and always will remain the fruits of Christ's atonement alone. But it is also an error to imagine, that our merit alone, judicially ascertained, is that which is at the last day to influence and decide the grant of eternal happiness, as if all must depend exclusively and precisely upon reward and punishment, properly so called. We are not to forget, that the inward order of the affections, which is the essence of true virtue, does in its very nature constitute the sound health of the mind, and consequently the happiness of a rational moral being. There is, in fact, no merit at all on the part of man, no more in faith than virtue. But faith is the means and channel of comfort, because by faith we apply unto ourselves

the fruit of Christ's redemption, and the assurance of it; and virtue is not only the natural and certain sign of faith, and therefore of the divine acceptance, but it is also to be considered as an actual ingredient of the rational happiness of the human mind, and is as essentially requisite to produce it, as health is indispensable to a comfortable state of body, and to cheerfulness of mind. He that does not hold virtue in high value in this point of view,—that purity of heart to which God and conscience are all in in all; whoever thinks, that perhaps he is doing it much honour, if he considers it merely as a sort of dress and ornament to the life of a person who is already in a sound and happy religious state,—that man betrays an uncommon degree of ignorance of the true sense of Holy Writ, as well as of the constitution of human nature. It is to be lamented, that many.

writers and preachers seem to conspire together to make *virtue* a term of ridicule, a sort of religious by-word ; and never to mention it without some odious and contemptuous accompaniment. They place faith and grace on the one part, and virtue, good works, individual merit, and pharisaical righteousness on the other part, in eternal opposition to one another. They first take pains to confound these latter points together, as though they were all identically the same ; and of course virtue, that predominant attachment to moral order, that prevailing inclination to all that is excellent, and good, and pleasing unto God, are put in the same scale of worth and estimation with sanctimonious and hypocritical righteousness. And, then, a field is opened for condemning as utterly insignificant, as of no manner of account, all that goes by the name of morality,

of goodness of heart, of righteous affections, of the love of our fellow-creatures, of sincerity of intention, of integrity of principle, while faith and grace are the sole and constant theme: as if it were not precisely the work of faith, and the office of grace, to create and to maintain this good and righteous frame of mind and character, and thereby to renew the image of God in man^y. It is plainly evident, that such is not the language of Holy Writ; and the advocates of this religion of mere feelings appear not unfrequently to be almost sorry, that the word of God attributes so much worth and efficacy to active godliness, that is, to practical religion. The passages which inculcate this are thought little of by them, and are utterly overlooked. They would doubtless wish from their hearts, that many expressions were differently

^y See Titus, ii. 11, 12. Gal. v. 6.

worded, or would admit of another sense, which have been used by the apostles, and even by our Lord himself, upon this subject, not to mention the language of the Old Testament. At least, they endeavour to conceal from themselves, and if they can from others, the plain and natural meaning of those passages which inculcate and maintain the importance and necessity of a righteous and virtuous frame of mind: they thrust them aside, and turn away our attention from them, precisely that they may not be convinced, and be compelled to own, that moral goodness of heart is at least something essential in the business of religion and of the happiness of man. Such is the influence of prejudices, of those especially which are built on piety and zeal for the honour of God. For we are by no means so uncharitable, as to lay any imputation on the sincerity of all those

persons without exception, whose opinions on this subject we conceive to be erroneous. Where that sincerity may happen to be wanting every individual must himself best know, and it must be left exclusively to his own conscience to determine. But it is certainly possible, that this matter may be contemplated in such a point of view, and be so admitted and established in the mind, that persons of entire sincerity of heart, who fancy themselves to be in perfect accordance with the language of divine truth in what they hold and what they teach, may, however, have gone astray to the greatest distance from that truth.

There is a farther apparent cause, why such persons are withheld from setting any value on moral qualities,—namely, the idea that these are more man's own work, while mental feelings and emotions are more the work of the Holy Spirit and of

grace. Hence they are afraid, lest a regard for the former, and any value which may be set upon them, will only nourish spiritual pride, which can find no place in the case of feelings ; because these would be considered solely as the work of God in man. There would perhaps be some weight in this, were it not plainly demonstrable, that order and right direction in the mind and affections are, in every instance, far more evidently and intrinsically produced in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, than these undefinable paroxysms and excitements, which, as we have shown in the first part, are undoubtedly in themselves by no means to be distinguished from the work of nature ; and, therefore, unless they are marked by their higher and more salutary tendency, may easily be, and most probably are, the effect of false notions on the human fancy. Whoever has bestowed close and impartial

attention on himself, will find that that is confirmed by his own experience which religion teaches, namely, that the amendment and restoration of the soul to order, as well as our advancement in the love of God and goodness, are, in a certain sense, a process merely passive on the part of man. Truth in the conscience,—those spiritual convictions which have immediate reference to ourselves,—that divine and penetrating light which discovers to us what we are not, and what we ought to be,—all these exist already without our having need to give existence to them: all depends solely on our yielding to them; whether we are disposed to give our practical assent; or whether we wilfully withdraw our attention and dissipate our thoughts, and so resist the grace that works within us.

We trust that this will obviate all the danger which is sometimes feared from

our doctrine,—namely, that men are thus taught to change and amend themselves; whereas the whole of the business, it is said, can no otherwise be effected, than by man's yielding himself to be changed and amended by Almighty God. It would be but reasonable, first to point out, more exactly and more intelligibly, the distinction between the meaning of these two modes of expression, before so much importance is attributed to them, and before the former is declared to be the certain means of separating man from God, and of leading him to destruction. It would, no doubt, be extremely absurd, and in direct contradiction to the word of God, for any man to fancy himself changed, merely because he has discontinued some outward vicious practice to which he had been previously addicted; or, in the place of some sinful inclination, which before had ruled him, should indulge some other

inclination equally wicked, which should expel the former ; though the heart should meanwhile continue still bound as fast as ever unto vanity, by one chain or another. It is quite evident that this is no amendment at all ; certainly not that amendment which religion demands, and which is necessary to salvation. For this consists in that change of mind, by which the love of God and goodness becomes predominant, and the whole heart is bent to please God in a pure conscience void of offence. Now, it would not be easy to say, in what the difference between the two methods consists, either to amend ourselves in this way, or to yield ourselves to be amended by Almighty God. Holy Writ informs us in many places, that in repentance something must be done by the penitent himself. “To amend his ways and his doings,” “to purify his heart,” “to cease

to do evil," "to learn to do well:" these are positive demands from man, and solemnly enjoined upon him. But, on the other hand, this salutary change of mind is as frequently ascribed to God; and we have before declared with what great reason it is so ascribed. The question then remains, how both are to be reconciled; or what must properly take place in the human mind, during which the truth of the one as well as of the other shall remain unimpeached, so that there be no necessity for imagining the existence of two distinct guidances and methods. The one says, "amend yourself;" the other, "yield yourself to be amended." It will be to no purpose to stop short with the unceasing repetition of these words; but we must endeavour to ascertain what is particularly to be done by those who are actually desirous of being changed and amended. If we

wish for the clear sense of these words, and examine the question thoroughly, and admit the express declarations of Holy Writ ; namely, that it is God alone who creates all spiritual good in the soul of man by his word, that is, by the convictions of truth contained in, or unerringly drawn from the word of God ; we shall then find that the two statements are entirely and perfectly capable of being reconciled, inasmuch as, with regard to man, all depends solely on his compliance with this important injunction, “ Mark well and carefully the divine truth which presses on the conscience : yield to it with sincerity ; and follow it throughout, wheresoever it may lead you.” Unless we maintain the doctrine of grace absolutely irresistible, this is man’s business in religion ; it is that which must be done by himself, and for the omission or neglect of which he must be answerable.

Whoever is capable of observing with sufficient accuracy what takes place within himself in a case of this kind, we appeal to that person's own experience, whether the matter has not passed precisely so in his repentance and amendment; whether this attention, this unfeigned assent and compliance, were not necessary on his part, in order that the influence of grace and truth might meet with no obstruction in him. And if what is thus universally essential in the business be on all hands admitted, we leave it to others to judge, whether the difference between "amending ourselves" and "yielding ourselves to be amended" is of such importance, when the terms are thus clearly and duly understood; and whether there be so much danger to the soul as is sometimes apprehended in their promiscuous use. It is God that worketh all things in us by his word: but that

word must be received in “ singleness of heart,” “ with all readiness,” with a sincere and attentive frame of mind. Perhaps it may be insisted, that the mind is far more passive in the process of repentance and amendment than we represent it to be. So it certainly will be, if, instead of being influenced by clear and intelligible convictions, it is violently hurried away solely by strong tumultuous feelings. If this is to be called “ yielding ourselves to be amended;” it will contradict truth and Scripture, which informs us, that every salutary spiritual change which is produced by the *word* is undeniably a work of God. The superiority would therefore be assigned where it does not belong: for that amended frame of mind which is built on genuine and clearly acknowledged truth, is far more assured, and therefore far more estimable, than any amendment can be, which owes

its existence to indistinct and passionate emotions, which do not admit of being derived from clear views and sure convictions.

Thus, then, every active step in the commencement and progress of religious and moral improvement is an actual work of God: and it is quite inconceivable, how any one who thinks he has repented can presume so absurdly to undervalue, and disregard moral virtue and goodness in the human heart. As their absence constitutes man's guilt, and the unhappy consequences of that absence will create his misery, it must follow, that when the conscience is once awakened, the penitent will abhor the cause of his misery, and at the same time ardently long for the opposite state of mind; and the result will be an actual return from the love of sin to the love of God, and of all that is good. If this longing and return be real

and sincere, they will certainly obtain the favour of God, and are an undoubted sign of our acceptance in Christ. They are at the same time an unfailing source of inward content and happiness, because they are inseparable from inward order and good affections. All the distinctions and artificial terms which may be employed to obscure this question cannot possibly alter its nature, nor change the constitution of the human mind. Whoever means to be happy must be good. The one cannot possibly exist without the other. To change this order, is to subvert that eternal order which the Almighty has established.

Where, then, we may ask, is the use of carefully noticing and keeping exact journals of the mind's feelings? By such journals the world is continually informed, it is presumed, to its great edification, of the writer's state of mind from day to

day, and from hour to hour ; what word of Scripture or godly conversation moved him yesterday, what hymn or meditation affected him to-day. If this mode of observing the variations in the mind's religious state is considered to be necessary, and those variations are to be carefully registered and communicated to the world in print, into the utility of which we do not mean to inquire at present ; this practice would certainly be most beneficial to the journalist himself, and most instructive for his readers,—if he employed his attention in tracing the progress of actual improvement in his affections ; if he thus learnt himself, and showed to others, how sincerity, meekness, contentment, charity, brotherly love, magnanimity, indifference towards earthly things, and the whole train of Christian virtues, had acquired increasing strength in him, and had exemplified themselves still more

and more from time to time in his actual conduct. Whether we are become better men in our affections and our lives, and how far we are become so ; this is a matter of infinitely greater interest to ourselves, and may at all times be far more useful unto others for their profit and instruction, than to mark, and register, and publish a host of extraordinary excitements, of the truth, and justness, and value of which we can be no otherwise assured, than as far as they tend and really serve to make us truly good. It must likewise destroy the journalist's spiritual pride and self-exaltation, when he perceives, and is, and never ceases to be conscious, that both to will and to do that which is good is constantly worked in him by the sole fountain of all light and truth : and that in consequence the remarking good affections and virtuous actions tends at least as much to the glory of divine grace, as

a watchful and minute attention to feelings and excitements. It is indeed true, that a man may be mistaken in both of these modes of observation. But in the one he cannot be deceived, unless he is resolved to deceive himself : in the other, on the contrary, feeble intellect and narrow views render it much more possible and likely, that those feelings should be taken for supernatural and divine which are certainly very far removed from being so.

And now, from all that has been said, we can form no other conclusion than this,—that a man's feelings, or his state of mind, in any circumstances of his repentance and future religious life, possess no necessary and universal certainty ; and therefore cannot be insisted upon as of such extreme importance without very great prejudice to religion ; but that, on the contrary, real virtue, in its best, intrinsic, and most exalted sense, as it con-

sists in the unfeigned love of God and man, is not only the surest sign of acceptance and communion with God, but is in its very nature a source of the purest and most heartfelt joy and happiness. We might produce a number of passages from divines of high respect in confirmation of our opinions ; and which, as they are well known, must make it appear extremely strange, that these opinions should excite such distrust, should give such umbrage, and occasion such uncharitable reflections, when they are advanced and maintained in other times and by other persons. But the task would be tedious, and therefore we forbear.

Perhaps some persons may be inclined to unite a virtuous frame of mind, and peculiar experiences into a twofold sign of divine acceptance, and to build its assurance upon this union. But, if a sign can be dispensed with, sometimes without

prejudice to the thing which it is designed to mark,— or when it is so uncertain, that it must always be previously warranted by another ground of assurance, which is infallible and always present,— it is, in truth, no sign at all. This name belongs to that alone which at all times gives certainty, even when it is unaccompanied with any other. To the former class of signs belong beyond all doubt, in the present question, mere gratifying mental feelings; and to the latter, with equal certainty, our earnest diligence in a life of godliness. But this godliness itself is pregnant with the most delightful feelings in many points of view; resting, indeed, upon the foundation of truth in their origin and cause,—namely, the consciousness of good affections; and being therefore totally distinct from those emotions which are created only by the fancy. These rejoicing feelings are even in

themselves a great reward, though they are by no means wanted as a necessary sign of divine favour.

For these precious feelings and their producing cause, a life of piety and virtue, and our consequent acceptance with Almighty God, we can never adequately express our gratitude for the redemption by Jesus Christ, and the pardoning mercy and renovating grace so purchased for us. It is unpardonable, that his respect for virtue and moral goodness, and for the diligent practice of them, should ever induce any man ungratefully to undervalue that forgiveness of sin, and that acceptance with God, which we owe exclusively to Christ's atonement. But, on the other hand, it is extremely uncharitable and calumnious, to charge that respect for virtue generally and at random with the base ingratitude of undervaluing and disregarding this most sacred

truth, this most consoling fact and doctrine of the Saviour's atonement, redemption, and unceasing mediation and intercession. Strange must the mind of that man, of that Christian be, who does not reflect upon and feel, with the deepest emotions of gratitude and love, what his divine Redeemer has done for him. Blotting out the guilt of sin, remission of its punishment, removal of its natural and unhappy consequences, indulgence and forbearance towards our faults and infirmities, when they are not wilful nor deliberate, motives to goodness, and assistance in the practice of it, — all these we have from Christ our Saviour ; who, therefore, cannot possibly be held too dear and precious to our souls, for his adorable mercy and loving-kindness, in that stupendous sacrifice which has accomplished our deliverance.

THIRD PART.

THE following miscellaneous observations and reflections appear to us so closely connected with our subject, as to deserve a place in a separate section.

How has this religion of feelings found such general acceptance? It may be ascribed, first, to the indolence of the human mind, which is more ready to yield to indistinct images that strike the sense, than to strain the attention in clearing the obscurity and tracing the origin of such images. The mind is always disposed to strong emotions, and finds it more convenient to indulge than

to explain them. It is loath to part with them, because it often has nothing with which to replace them. That spiritual instruction and guidance likewise is most welcome, which gives least occupation to the thinking faculty, and withal is held to be the safest. Natural temperament, weakness and confusion of the mental powers, education, society, example, all contribute to the same effect.

There is besides a strong propensity to admire whatever is uncommon, and at the same time austere ; that seems to rise above nature, and to bear the stamp of divinity : this fills the mind with reverence and awe. We wonder at persons, who claim to experience the immediate influences of the Spirit of God. Sound religious knowledge, and the just but peaceful convictions which it creates, are too intelligible, and savour too much of human nature ; and are therefore thought

but lightly of in comparison with what is wrapt in solemn, mysterious darkness. The enlightened religion of a Tillotson, an Ostervald, a Reinbecke, who aimed to amend themselves and others by well-grounded motives and convictions, is disregarded, for the fanatical effusions of teachers who dwell minutely on their own experiences, and on those alternations of terror and of triumph, which have marked the process of their repentance.

Something may also be attributed to the prevalence of profaneness and of unbelief. Persons come to think, that they cannot recede too far from the irreligion which meets their notice. Because the profligate and the scoffer have no sense at all of Christ's religion, they think they cannot have enough ; and they value it in proportion to its vehement and unintelligible character.

There are others who propose to themselves a future and distant panacea in this religion of feeling, which is some time or other to cure them of those vanities which they cannot at present resolve to relinquish. Their early good principles cannot be entirely rooted out by present dissipation. The hour of reflection sometimes discovers awful prospects of the future, which imperatively demand a change of life: but all are dissipated by a succession of illusions ; among the rest, by that fatal one of a religion in store, in which they may at some distant period take refuge, which by no long process of terrors and then of transports may save their souls, whilst it spares them the necessity of an early, and the trouble of a true repentance. True repentance will call for the most serious and attentive scrutiny into the deepest recesses of the heart, the keen and self-collected glance

of inward examination ; it will insist upon the shunning all places and occasions of danger from temptation ; upon resolutely following every conviction of the conscience ; upon opening the heart by prayer and meditation to the light of truth, in order to see the folly, the baseness, and the danger of sin ; and, finally, upon guarding the affections and the conduct with that strict watchfulness which the awful urgency of the case demands. This is considered to be far too impracticable a course. But the mind still cannot cast off the thought, how all is at last to end. The only resource is, to rest upon being before death “ laid hold on by grace ” so powerfully, as to become at once, and as by enchantment, new creatures by a factitious course of agony and of joy, of terror and of transport ; which, like the wand of the enchantress, is almost instantaneously to transform the swine

into a man. Resting upon this future compendious process,—on which, together with its advocates and teachers, they place exclusive value,—men continue still immersed in life's vanities and follies, without the smallest present intention of becoming what they ought to be.

There is no doubt that this system of religion has a pernicious influence on men's language and demeanour. In the pulpit it degrades religious instruction by words and phrases mystical, unintelligible, sanctimonious, vulgar, coarse, heated, and often impiously familiar with regard to the Supreme Being, accompanied by tones of voice and gestures of body which bid defiance to all good taste and common sense. In daily intercourse it gives rise to a behaviour gloomy, austere, exclusive, of such apparent sanctity as to announce nothing less than a mind raised far above

humanity. We do not wish to charge this behaviour generally with hypocrisy. Thus much, however, is undoubtedly true, — that in very many instances persons of this description differ not at all in their dealings with their neighbours, and in general moral conduct, from men who make no pretensions to such extraordinary sanctity. They are found upon trial to be no better than others, : the same indulgence of appetite and passion, the same rapacity, worldly-mindedness, disregard of others' property, the same want of charity in speech, shall mark their conduct that marks the conduct of any of their neighbours. Where, however, such persons are sincere, we must lay their behaviour to the account of ignorance, of narrow views, or of erroneous instruction. In either case, great harm is done to genuine religion, which they take pains to render unamiable and repulsive to the

world in general, and ridiculous to its declared adversaries. It therefore behoves the teachers of this system to beware of thus discouraging the friends of true religion, and of justifying its enemies, by their highly injudicious, to say the best of it, but in many instances absolutely fanatical, doctrine and manner of instruction, for the mischievous effects of which they must be responsible.

But we are told, that this mode of teaching is more generally efficacious ; that whole neighbourhoods are awakened and converted by such powerful preaching ; that therefore the inference from the effect unto the cause is in this case manifest. But in fact this proves no more than this,— that human resolves are more intense and warm when coupled with enthusiasm, with a heated fancy, and with images allied to sense, that take entire possession of the mind, which by such

impulses is rendered more active in the direction which it once has taken : but whether this activity be well directed, is quite another question. The objects suited to these gross emotions are indeed pursued with irresistible warmth ; but what happens not to lie exactly in the way of this strong influence of sense is too easily overlooked. The sufferings of Christ upon the cross, the pains of hell, the sentence of damnation enforced or reversed,— these harrowing ideas seize upon the fancy, and infuse enthusiasm into the thoughts and language. But by such overstrained efforts the mind is sure to lose its proper balance in some degree ; and other contemplations are set aside, which would be of far more extensive, more solid and lasting benefit in the great work of repentance and amendment. The close but noiseless study of the heart with its concealed im-

purities, deliberate reflection on the great practical truths of religion and their reasonable grounds, due calculation of the gain or loss in our election between God and the present world, strict and incessant guard upon the conscience, the affections, and the conduct,—these are too often smothered by the overwhelming sensations of enthusiasm : yet these alone are indispensable to true repentance, and violent emotions and excitements make not any necessary nor essential part of it. Hence we observe, that these far-famed conversions do not always turn out so complete in their extent, nor so steady in their duration, as at first they may seem to promise. The violence does not last ; and the convert is found in the sequel to be a mere ordinary personage in moral conduct and amendment. Grave looks, a stiff demeanour, a sanctimonious air, a certain cant in language, exclusive inter-

course with a party, abstraction from harmless and indifferent things as though they were vain and carnal,—these are often the only fruit of such conversions. In many cases they may be real and sincere; but that very often, with all the parade of especial gifts of grace, the whole at last amounts to no more than such outward demonstrations, no one can pretend to deny in the face of undoubted experience. Upon the whole, the vehemence of zeal is no evidence of its truth. The persuasion of an especial work of God may make the party a resolute enthusiast; but just and rational convictions alone will make him a truly good and moral man.

It is not the province of the Christian preacher to address himself to the imagination and the meaner passions of his hearers. The impressions so created do no substantial good, and may do much

harm. It is no difficult matter to gain popularity by such a practice: and to renounce this favourable opinion is a sacrifice not easy to be achieved by those who are in possession of it. The commendation is however entirely factitious; and would much better be exchanged for the well-grounded consciousness of sound, judicious, and rational instruction. The aim of the preacher should always be to create in his hearers a frame of mind and affections, which is to be the constant ruling principle of their lives and conduct. This is not the work of passionate excitement, but of clear religious knowledge, and just convictions derived from the word of God; such as will stand the test of examination in the silent hours of retirement. It is a light created not by the flame of mental feelings, but by the bright sunshine of scripture truth and argument; which, while

it warms the heart, enlightens the mind, and convinces the conscience. We do not say, that no appeal of any sort is to be made unto the feelings ; for feelings of some sort must be excited before the will can be inclined : the question is the nature of those feelings. We say, that they ought not to be the work of the meaner passions. Ungrounded terrors of God's personal resentment, harrowing sensations created by frightful pictures of the punishments of the damned, or even melting sympathies produced by minute and elaborate descriptions of our Saviour's sufferings and death upon the cross,—these are not the most legitimate means of working on the human mind ; which, while it is scared with terror, or vents its sympathy in floods of tears, may, and often does, forget the final purpose of all religious feeling ; which is to change the heart and amend the life.

Those are the best and most appropriate feelings which spring from appeals to the reason and the conscience, on the hatefulness and ingratitude of sin, the wonderful means devised to deliver mankind from its guilt and punishment, the blessedness of a good life, in its own nature, in its good effects in this world, in the approbation and favour of God, and in its final reward in the world to come. Here are abundant materials for the best and even the warmest feelings ; and to kindle these is so far from being forbidden to the preacher, that it is his most incumbent duty.

Guided by these principles, we shall not be easily imposed upon, when we hear of congregations being raised into a state of fermentation by a popular preacher's storm upon the passions, and are told of wonderful conversions by

means of such excitements. This we must expect, where it is the preachers' object to goad their hearers into a kind of religious frenzy by extravagant flights of declamation, by impassioned descriptions, by thundering damnation in their ears in almost every sentence of their coarse and vulgar eloquence. Common minds are easily confounded and dismayed by such torrents of wordy terror; in which, however, they have no clear, intelligible certainty that all which is thus forced upon them is exactly true. But some incoherent, obscure, and anxious idea of danger makes them conclude, that their teacher surely must be right in his dreadful denunciations. They therefore, as it were, lash themselves into agonizing sensations, and work their passions into a blaze, which, like a fire in straw, would subside as soon as kindled, were it not constantly fed by new applications

of the self-same fuel. With equal zeal, but far superior judgment, the rational preacher uses arguments, motives, and persuasions of convincing force, that reach the conscience, and create an unconstrained assent. He, then, leaves the mind, thus enlightened, convinced, and moved, to generate its ulterior feelings and resolutions under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit, and in a manner suitable to its own natural structure. The sermon will thus lead the hearer to turn more closely on himself in serious meditation, to feel the shame of sin, the dignity and excellence of virtue, and the happiness of union and communion with God. Conducive to this end, there is a peculiar language of the heart and conscience, familiar to every preacher who is himself a good man, and who speaks from his own experience in the religious life. His aim will be to make his hearers not enthusiasts, but

pious and virtuous men : and this, with the divine blessing, he will not unfrequently effect, though his labours and their success be circumscribed within narrow limits in fame and popularity. When the crowd, in quitting the church, exclaims, What an excellent, delightful, moving sermon ! it is not saying much in its commendation. Far more to the purpose is it, when some silent hearer, after calm reflection, whispers to himself, “ What I have now heard is precisely true : such ought I to be ; and such by God’s help I am resolved to be ; and I will pray to God to make me so.” To attain this end will be the preacher’s whole ambition : and happy the man who can attain it by the gifts of nature and of grace !

If men are sincere in this highest of all concerns, there is no reason why they should be afraid or ashamed of evincing

their sincerity in their conversation and behaviour. They owe it to God, to religion, to themselves, and to their fellow-creatures, to act this part on all due occasions. To act otherwise would discover such a total absence of all just thought, as must naturally bring their sincerity into question. How unaccountable, that the greatest of all human interests, than which reason knows nothing more excellent, more dignified, more important,—namely, our relation to God, and our prospects into eternity, should be felt so coldly, and treated with as much indifference as some antiquated piece of human story ! No warmth of feeling in private devotion, no courageous and appropriate earnestness in converse,—much rather repugnance, shyness, disgust, displeasure, or derision, in regard to such commanding subjects, which, notwithstanding, are still believed and still professed,—how

inconsistent this ! Either no religion at all, or one that will maintain its dignity : absence of feeling here is absence of common sense. Even the sincerely good man sometimes, doubtless, feels humbled in a want of courage to show his just sense of the importance of religion where it ought to be done ; and fails in that generous self-confidence in converse and demeanour, which reflection tells him is proper in itself, and consistent with his character. He feels many a secret rebuke of conscience for his cowardice. Fear of giving offence, or of incurring ridicule by the honest avowal of his feelings, overpowers his timid mind, and makes him sacrifice the greatest of all honours,—the name of a serious Christian upon principle. Good sense and prudence will indeed always regulate this duty : but prudence must always be distinguished from unwarrantable want of

spirit. The good man must never shrink from standing up boldly, at all times, in the cause of God, as he would in the cause of his best and dearest friend. Such behaviour will add to his credit, and increase his influence in the estimation of all whose estimation is of any value. It will also encourage the timid, and may, perhaps, reclaim the thoughtless. We by no means approve of the obtrusion of sacred subjects where they would manifestly be misplaced: all we wish is this, that a man should not be ashamed to show, on proper occasions, that the concerns of a future world, and the due preparation for it, are not a matter of indifference to him.

But on the ecclesiastic this duty is peculiarly incumbent. Religion is his business; and its concerns should make a superior impression on his mind, as

they possess the strongest claim upon his encouragement and support. Yet, even he need not be singular, in the odious sense of the word : but he will so temper social cheerfulness with gravity of demeanour, as to prove, that the great purpose of his office is never entirely absent from his thoughts. Towards those who err on the subject of feelings and experiences, he will always exercise Christian charity and kindness. He will blame what is defective in their opinions, and in their manner of enforcing them, only so far as it obstructs the common object of the amendment of mankind. Above all, he will himself abstain, and advise others to abstain, from treating them with ridicule and contempt ; for these are not the appropriate weapons for such a contest: mild argument and Christian persuasion will be his only armour of offence.

But the use of sober argument against religious extravagance and enthusiasm is by no means precluded. Their advocates may fairly be called upon to answer objections and explain their meaning. The proper source of information unto both parties is the word of God, when its language is explained, and its sense is fixed by just rules of interpretation ; which are supplied by the same legitimate criticism and sound reasoning that are applicable to every other composition. Regard must be likewise had to the constitution of human nature as framed by the Creator. These are the only true sources of decision : and to reject the latter, on any pretence of sanctity or low estimation of nature, is, in fact, to give up the question. We must leave to their ignorance and prejudices those who persist in referring to their own individual experiences, and reject all appeals to

reason and common sense : such persons are totally unqualified for controversy or argument. We have a right to expect something better from opponents of real learning, acquainted with the language and drift of Holy Writ, and possessed of an insight into human nature. They will endeavour to adduce at least some show of argument from these sources, and will abandon the utterly untenable ground of inexplicable feelings.

Either it is an irrefragable truth, that undefinable feelings and experiences are a sure ground of judgment as to the real existence of religion in the mind,— that whosoever is not religious precisely in this way, and cannot state exactly the time and occasion of his spiritual change, and the work of grace upon his heart in all its circumstances, has not been changed at all, has no pretension to religion, and no interest in God's favour

and acceptance, but still lies under the sentence of condemnation,— and whoever teaches otherwise, is leading men to their everlasting ruin :

Or this method is not true: feelings are no assurance: to experience this or that degree of terror and of joy is not necessary. But what *is* necessary is sincerity in embracing and in following those divine convictions which bring us to a knowledge of ourselves, to a thorough change in our frame of mind and affections, to our acceptance of the Mediator, to a predominant love of what is right and good. The sole infallible mark of true religion is righteousness in heart and life. It therefore behoves every friend to true religion to declare against the unfounded doctrine of experiences, as being a mischievous perversion of it, and an absolute hinderance to its genuine operation. He ought by every due

means to oppose the progress and diffusion of such mistaken doctrines ; to make a bold stand in defence of virtue, as the great and final purpose of Christianity ; and, while he admits and follows the influence of divine grace in the amendment of his own heart and life, to take comfort in these marks of divine favour, and of his interest in the redemption which is by Jesus Christ. He may then disregard the uncharitable judgments of those persons who, under a vain colour of faith and of self-abasement, look with contempt on practical virtue.

CONCLUSION.

Having now completed our design, we have only to add, that if our language has been occasionally strong, it must be imputed to our conviction of the justice of

our cause. We may not, perhaps, escape the usual reproach, that our enforcing our opinion is a certain sign of the absence of spiritual experience on our part. But this reproach shall never induce us to lose our temper : it comes naturally, and perhaps sincerely, from our opponents : instructed and prejudiced as such persons are, they cannot well do otherwise. For us it is sufficient, that to none can we be better known than to ourselves. We know that we are in earnest after truth : we know how far we have hitherto been influenced by it ; how far it has conducted us to our proper aim ; and we conclude that our road is right. We declare, in the presence of God, that we are anxious not to resist the convictions which come from him : we desire to embrace the truth wherever we find it : but we are not bound to pray to God to impart it to us by any other means

than those which he has himself appointed. We have no grounds for thinking feelings and experiences to be such means : but we see many reasons for holding them to be merely human and fallacious : and no man has a right to question our sincerity in religion because we are strangers to them. We console ourselves by inverting their conclusion : we are sincere in our religion ; of that we are assured ; therefore we should have had those feelings, beyond all doubt, if they were indispensable. Our minds are open to the truth : we pray to God to guide us by its light. We apply the words of Samuel to ourselves with full sincerity,—“ Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth :” but we must be first convinced that it is the Lord that speaketh.

THE END.

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